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**Books
of the Year**
Historians choose
their favourite
new reads

THE RADICAL RICHARD III

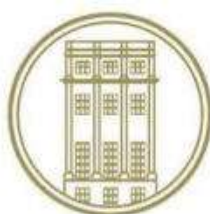
Why the medieval
king was a champion
of the people

Sex, lies and centurions
Life as a Roman soldier

"I am so dreadfully sea sick"
Nelson in his own words

2020
The historians'
verdict on a
dramatic year

Biting husbands' bottoms
17th-century pregnancy cravings



BALDWIN'S

ESTABLISHED 1872

How to decipher a Roman coin



One of the most famous Roman Emperors, Nero reigned from 54 to 68 AD. Whether or not he actually fiddled while Rome burned, he is still remembered as one of the most notoriously hedonistic and irresponsible rulers of Rome.

Nero's reign was fraught with troubles in an ever-expanding Empire. It saw the rebellion of Boudicca, which nearly resulted in the complete abandonment of Roman Britain. In the later years of Nero's rule, the province of Judaea rose up against Roman occupants, triggering a conflict which would last for years.

The denarius was one of the primary coins of the Roman Empire. Minted by hand, in high-purity silver, it represented around a day's wages for a Roman soldier. This coin was minted on the Capitoline Hill in Rome, around 65 AD. It depicts Nero as he would have appeared – with his distinctive, now overweight portrait taking up most of the design on the obverse, or 'heads' side of the coin.

This international Roman currency, legal tender in all parts of the Empire, still lives on to this day. It was the forerunner of the penny, and until decimalisation of the British currency in 1971, pennies were known by the abbreviation 'd', for denarius.

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WELCOME

CHRISTMAS 2020

“When historians of the future come to write about the early 21st century, I expect they’ll devote quite a few pages to 2020. A year that began with forest fires in Australia and the ongoing rumble of Brexit negotiations has since been dominated by the **coronavirus pandemic** and the **Black Lives Matter movement**. But what do today’s historians make of all this? To find out, we’ve convened a panel of experts to examine the historical underpinnings and significance of these and other major events of the past 12 months. Turn to page 50 for that, and do please write in to let us know your thoughts.

One historical parallel frequently cited in regard to Covid-19 is how Britain coped during the Blitz. And we shouldn’t be surprised to see this comparison being made, as the **Second World War** continues to be the defining event in modern British history. In Alec Ryrie’s *Think Piece* this month, he argues that the war has even replaced Christianity as our new national religion – a role for which the conflict is not entirely well-suited. You’ll find his article on page 25.

There’s plenty of more escapist history this month as well, from our cover feature on **Richard III’s radical parliament** to snapshots of life in the **Roman army** and the curious **cravings of pregnant women** in the early modern period. Plus, as it’s the Christmas issue, look out for our **Christmas quiz** and **Books of the Year** round-up.

I hope you have an enjoyable Christmas break, and I look forward to continuing the historical journey with you in 2021.

Rob Attar
Editor



THIS ISSUE’S CONTRIBUTORS



Guy de la Bédoyère

The army was everywhere in the Roman world, but there was far more to it than fighting and guarding the frontiers. It encapsulated the whole Roman experience.

Guy explores what life was like for soldiers in the Roman army on page 32



Marianne Czisnik

Studying the relationship between Nelson and Lady Hamilton through their own words, I have been able to discover a wealth of human experience from passionate love to revolutionary politics.

Marianne examines Nelson’s love letters to find the man behind the myth on page 66



Matt Lewis

Richard III is often portrayed springing into life in 1483 bent on taking the throne, yet he was 30, and his life to that point paints a very different picture of the man.

Matt argues Richard III was a champion of the common people on page 18

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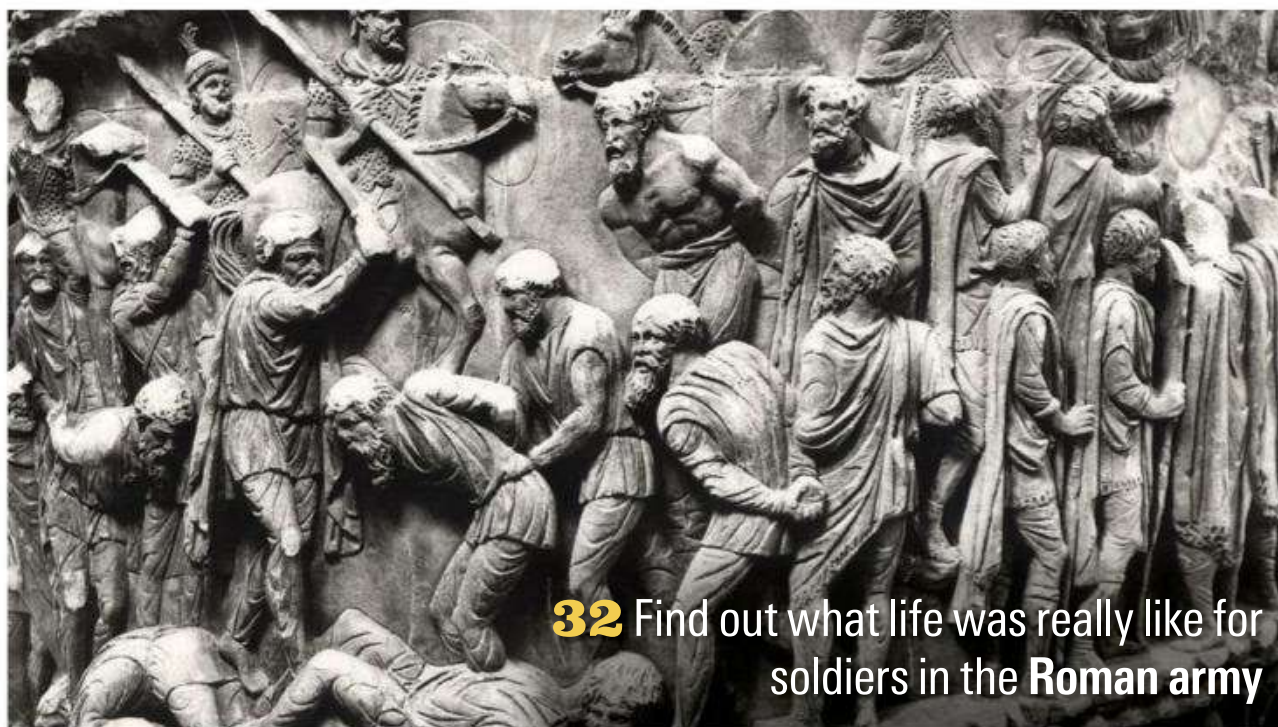
From chunks of coal to human flesh, Jennifer Evans explores bizarre early modern pregnancy cravings

66 Nelson in his own words

Marianne Czisnik combs through Nelson's love letters to draw out a hidden side of the naval hero



Discover why Alec Ryrie thinks invoking the Blitz spirit won't help Britain fight Covid-19, on page 25



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GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN/ELEANOR SHAKESPEARE



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EYE-OPENER

Big cat

Etched into a desert hillside in southern Peru, this huge image of a cat – measuring approximately 37 metres in length – may not seem inconspicuous, but it has remained hidden until now thanks to the angle at which it was drawn and the effects of erosion. It's the most recent of a series of drawings to have been discovered dotting the Peruvian desert, and is thought to date from between 500 BC and AD 200.

Known as the Nazca Lines, these designs, or geoglyphs, resemble animals and geometric patterns. They were created by making depressions and incisions

in the ground, and by removing rocks and pebbles to expose the coloured earth beneath.

This feline figure is near to other designs – it was first spotted during work to create a new path to an observation platform – but has its origins in the late Paracas era, which actually pre-dates Nazca culture. "We know this from comparing iconographies," said Johny Isla, Peru's chief archaeologist for the Nazca Lines. "Paracas textiles, for example, show birds, cats and people that are easily comparable to these geoglyphs. They are [also] smaller in size [than the Nazca examples]".

TALKING POINTS

Hooked on history



From visiting palaces to reading racy poems, historians have been reflecting on the experiences that sparked their passion for the past. **ANNA WHITELOCK** clocked these formative moments

As lovers of history, it's always interesting to reflect on when and how the passion grabbed us. **Janina Ramirez** (@DrJaninaRamirez) asked Twitter: "When did you realise that the present and future only made sense alongside the past?" For Janina, it was "aged seven, in Hampton Court Palace". As she describes vividly: "I walked over a threshold passed by thousands before me & felt time slip before me."

For **Jonathan Foyle** (@JonathanFoyle), it was "finding coins in the soil of a field: one of Diocletian c300, one William and Mary c1690. Such similar copper discs, over a millennium – but only three yards apart." **Phillipa Vincent-Connolly** (@PhillipaJC) tweeted: "My grandparents taking me to National Trust properties within an hour's drive of Wimborne [in Dorset]. Wondering why I wasn't born into nobility when staring at palatial paintings of ladies in glorious Georgian gowns, watching Saturday afternoon historical dramas wanting to know what really happened." **Rebecca Rideal** (@RebeccaRideal) cited a "brilliant Australian high-school teacher called Mrs Jamieson. She taught the history of 20th-century China with so much passion. Really brought the subject alive. I was then drawn to the 17th century after reading the Earl of Rochester's dirty poetry." It takes all sorts!

Hallie Rubenhold (@HallieRubenhold), meanwhile, recalled being "taken to Bodie, an old gold mining ghost town at the foot of the Californian Sierras. The wind whistled through the empty buildings. It was like stepping into a parallel universe. The 'wild west' suddenly became real and I became obsessed with understanding it." For **Penny Ewles-Bergeron** (@ABroadBrush) "it was reading Rosemary Sutcliff and Henry Treece aged about 10 – that sense that one could remove a veil and the past would be there with the human story and the wider cultural story too". **The Rt Hon Leggy Mountbatten, Esq** (@Zardo67) took me back by tweeting a picture of *The Hamlyn Children's History of the World*, which they received "for Christmas 1977 from my nan". They went on to do a degree in medieval and modern history at Liverpool University. **Brendan O'Connor** (@BrendanOConno20) caught the bug playing "the computer game *Crusader Kings*, which simulated 10th to 15th-century Europe". Not only did Brendan learn a lot but, as he explained: "If you want, you can create a religion that's into cannibalism, which means it's possible to eat the pope..." Gosh.

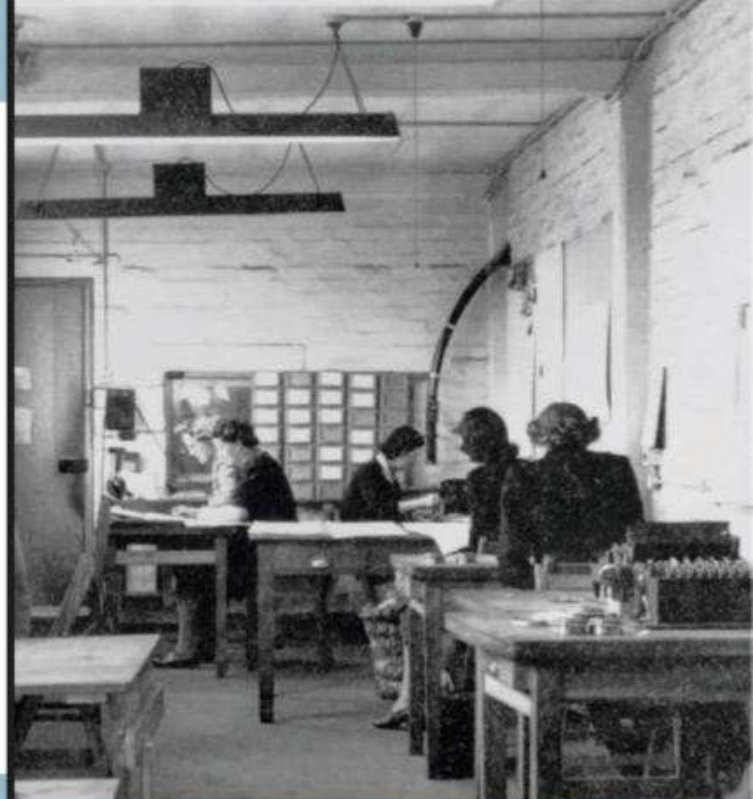
As for me, it was, like Janina Ramirez, at Hampton Court. The ability to breathe in the past, and to walk the corridors as others have for centuries, was thrilling. It's a feeling that has never left me. One can only hope that sites such as Hampton Court are protected through the pandemic and survive to stir the soul and senses for centuries to come. **H**

// I walked over a threshold passed by thousands before me and felt time slip before me //

Visits to Hampton Court in London are cited by both Anna Whitelock and Janina Ramirez as key moments in their nascent love of history



Join the debate at twitter.com/historyextra



Bletchley Park codebreakers, 1943. A new book argues that the "cult of Bletchley" has overstated its impact

HERITAGE

Bletchley Park's war role 'over-rated'

It's become synonymous with Britain's success in the Second World War, its role memorably depicted in films such as 2001's *Enigma* and 2014's *The Imitation Game*, starring Benedict Cumberbatch. Yet the codebreaking centre set up at the Buckinghamshire estate of Bletchley Park may not have been as crucial to the Allied victory as commonly thought, a new official history of UK spy agency GCHQ argues.

Its author, John Ferris, a historian at the University of Calgary, was given extensive access to Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) records in order to research *Behind the Enigma*, published by Bloomsbury in October. Exploring the development of the organisation from its inception in 1919 through to the 21st century, Ferris argues that a "cult of Bletchley" has obscured the reality of its Second World War contributions. Indeed, he suggests that, at the start of the conflict, Britain's poor codebreaking and intelligence capabilities were outclassed by those of Nazi Germany.

Ferris agrees that Bletchley Park did eventually develop sufficiently to hasten the end of the war – albeit not to the extent that is sometimes claimed – and that its success in intercepting the Nazis' strategic communications remains a high point in GCHQ's history. However, he maintains that its Second World War role must still be kept in perspective. "Bletchley is not the war-winner that a lot of Brits think that it is," he said. "Intelligence never wins a war on its own." **H**

HISTORY IN THE NEWS

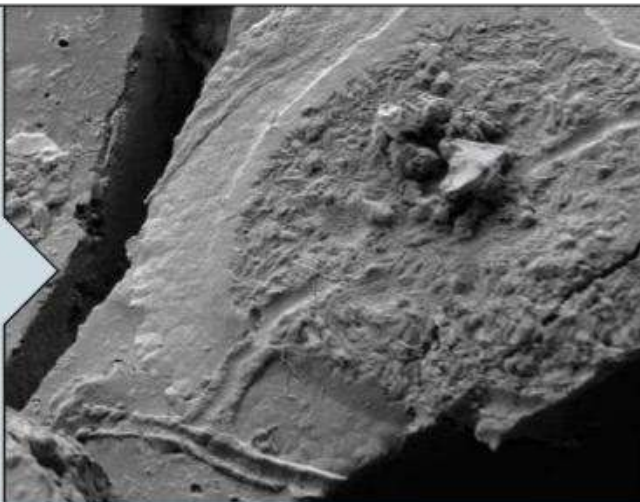
A selection of the stories hitting the **history headlines**

Herculaneum black shards are volcano victim's brain

A host of discoveries have been made in the remains of the ancient settlements of Pompeii and Herculaneum in the centuries since they were obliterated by Vesuvius in AD 79. Now, analysis of black, glass-like matter found among one victim's remains has yielded a remarkable result: they are well-preserved remnants of his brain.

The body of the young man in his twenties, who died face down on his bed in the town of Herculaneum, was first discovered in the 1960s. Researchers in the latest study used scanning electron microscopy to examine the shards of the unknown matter, which turned out to bear evidence of proteins found in the human brain as well as tubular and spherical structures likely to be neurons.

It's thought that the intense heat of Vesuvius's eruption, and a subsequent rapid period of cooling, turned the man's brain to a glass-like material and preserved cellular structures within it. Brain tissue has been found at sites elsewhere in the world, but this is the first time that such a discovery has been made in the region.



This black substance is the remains of the brain of a man killed when Vesuvius erupted 2,000 years ago

Experts find 'Anglo-Saxon warlord' in Berkshire field

The remains of what's thought to be an Anglo-Saxon warrior have been unearthed near the Berkshire town of Marlow. Analysis of the skeleton and grave revealed that the man was buried with bronze bowls, spears and a sword, and that, standing at around 1.8m (6ft) tall with well-developed musculature, he would have been physically intimidating. Experts believe that this, and his wealth, means he may have been a tribal leader in the region in the sixth century AD.



A sword found in the grave of an Anglo-Saxon warrior in Berkshire, who was described as "pretty butch" by project archaeologist Gabor Thomas

Online map charts tree graffiti

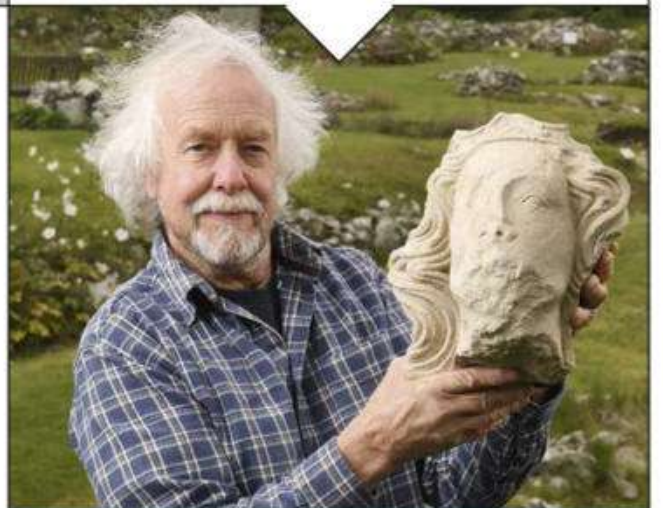
A new interactive archive of carvings etched into trees in the New Forest across the course of centuries can be explored online. The New Forest National Park Authority project asked visitors to take photos and note the location of the historical 'arborglyphs', which include concentric circles intended to ward off evil spirits and an arrowhead design known as 'the King's Mark', denoting trees to be used for shipbuilding. The map is available at newforestnpa.gov.uk/tree-graffiti.



An 'arborglyph', or tree carving, in the New Forest. A hundred such marks have been catalogued online

Stone head 'may depict king'

A stone sculpture of a man's head found in the ruins of Shaftesbury Abbey in Dorset in 2019 may be a likeness of a royal figure – possibly Plantagenet king Edward II, experts say. Detailing around the headband is thought to have shown a jewelled crown, while research suggests that the head was created in the 1340s, just over a decade after the king was deposed. Its discovery also suggests the possible existence of a gallery of royal statues at the abbey, which was closed by Henry VIII in 1539. 



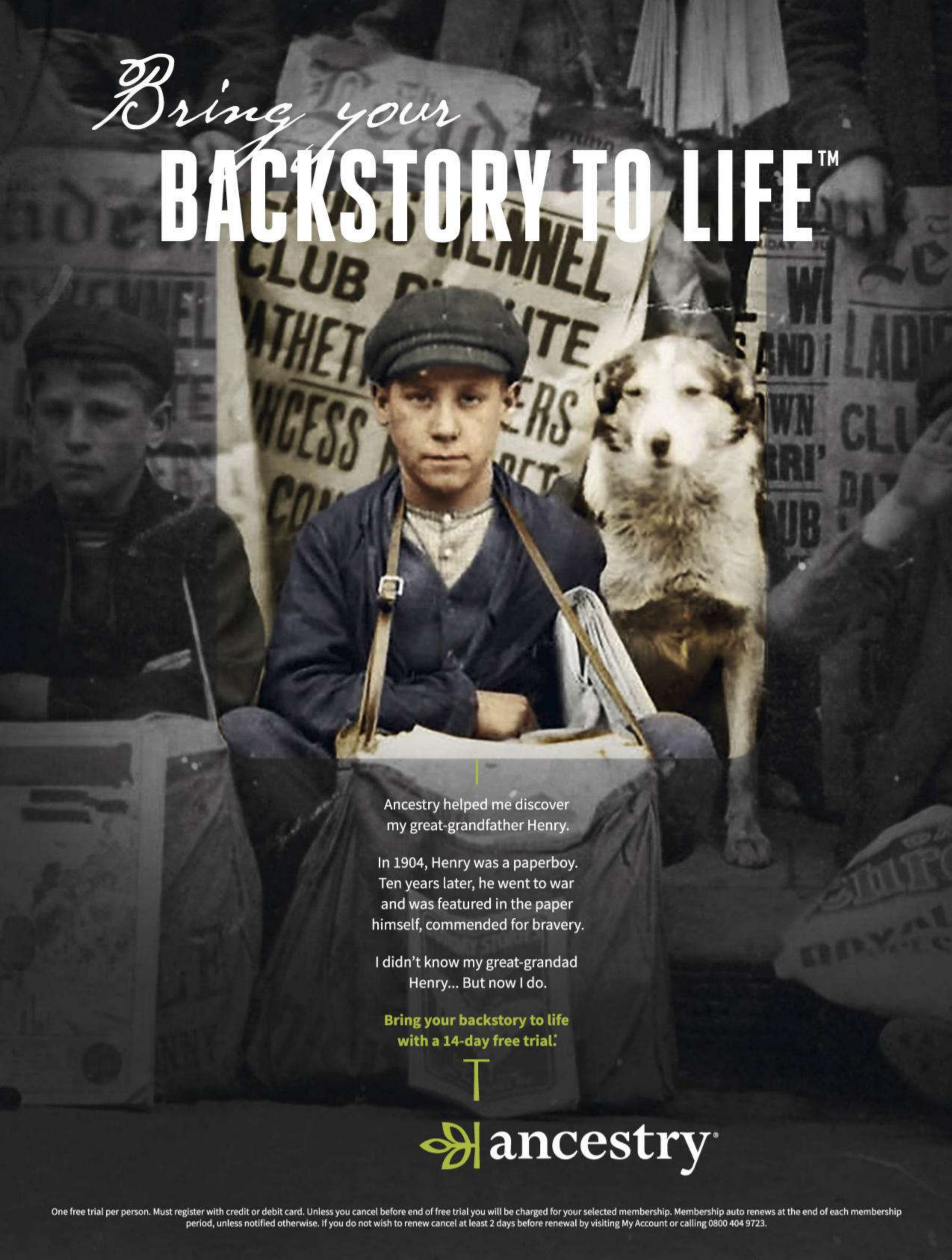
Dr Julian Richards, who led the dig at Shaftesbury Abbey, pictured with the mysterious stone head



The explosion of a 5.4-tonne Second World War bomb propelled a column of water high into the air

WW2 bomb goes off in Poland

The largest unexploded Second World War bomb yet found in Poland has detonated during attempts to defuse it. The five-tonne 'earthquake' bomb was dropped by the RAF in 1945 and was found at the bottom of a Baltic Sea shipping canal near the city of Swinoujscie. Although the shock of the detonation was reportedly felt across the city, around 750 residents had already been evacuated from the area as a precaution, and none of the divers involved in the operation were hurt.



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MICHAEL WOOD ON...
THE KINGDOM OF KONGO

// Like a black Joan of Arc, Kimpa Vita was burned at the stake as a heretic //

For this year's Black History Month, Historic Royal Palaces, the charity that looks after some of our great royal buildings, offered some fascinating

online cross-cultural linkages. In one, the writer Luke Pepera compared two Renaissance royals, Henry VIII, and his contemporary, Afonso I (reigned 1509–42) – the king of Kongo. Among the slides was a crucifix from Portuguese Angola, bearing a black Jesus Christ. This riveting image gave me a powerful flashback.

Almost 40 years ago I spent several weeks in the Congo (Zaire as was), a land wasted by Belgian colonialism, civil war and Mobutu's dictatorship. I took a 10-day journey upriver sleeping on the deck of a freighter, stopping in steamy river stations. Whiling away the time the crew told tales of Congolese history. The mate, Kalala, was a follower of Simon Kimbangu, who died in a prison in the Belgian Congo in 1951 and founded a religious movement that is now in the World Council of Churches. It's said Kimbangu had preached that Christ was African, born in the ancient kingdom of Kongo (now northern Angola).

Incredibly, the kingdom of Kongo lasted from 1390 to the late 1800s, and well into the 20th century as a vassal state of Portugal. The capital was Sao Salvador (M'Banza-Kongo), an attractive place in the north of Angola.

Perched above the Luezi river, with its cathedral, palace, and stone churches and houses, it had been what we might call an African Renaissance town. Converted very early to Catholicism, in 1491, the 'City of Kongo' was the first Christian city south of the equator. Not Christianised by conquest, its local elites kept their native culture and customs,

but they established western schools and a library under Afonso I. They even sent an ambassador to Rome. But in the late 17th century, when vast numbers of west Africans were being shipped to the Americas as slaves, successive wars were waged with the Portuguese, and then civil war ruptured the kingdom.

In 1704 a young noblewoman called Kimpa Vita rose in revolt. Gathering thousands of followers she reoccupied the ruined capital, preaching that God was African, Christ had been born in Kongo, and that St Anthony spoke through her. The saint was telling her, she said, to end the fighting, stop the slave trade, and restore an African Christian kingdom independent of the Europeans.

The revolt failed, and like a black Joan of Arc, Kimpa Vita was burned at the stake as a heretic along with her infant son. But her movement survived her. Several of Kimbangu's followers today believe he was her reincarnation, and they carry amulets of Christ and St Anthony depicted as black females.

That same Christian culture had a long afterlife in the Americas, too. Many of the slaves transported from Angola to Brazil, Cuba and Haiti were Christian. In South Carolina the Stono slave rebellion of 1739 was led by Congolese Christian slaves, and Kimpa Vita's cry for freedom, "*kanga munde*", was heard in the slave revolt in Haiti in 1791 (the subject of one of this year's standout history books, *Black Spartacus*). Was she a forgotten founding mother, then, of the Age of Revolution?

But we had to wait until John Thornton's *The Kongolese Saint Anthony* was published, 20 years ago now, to open our eyes to Kimpa Vita's extraordinary life, and the complex and fascinating histories of the Atlantic kingdoms of south central Africa. No doubt more is to come. With widespread literacy in the kingdom of Kongo, people kept archives and corresponded with Portugal and Rome; they sought education in Europe. And recent finds of documents in private hands and local collections suggest that more family archives, letters and clan histories may exist. Rich oral traditions also survive today and are being gathered by African historians – for example highlighting the role of Kimpa Vita's mother who survived her, and it seems inspired her, emphasising the role of powerful women in Congolese culture.

The story of the kingdom of Kongo is emblematic of how, until recently, sub-Saharan Africa has been written out of world history. But new histories are on the rise, as seen in Zeinab Badawi's panoramic BBC World News series *History of Africa*. In the time of Black Lives Matter, it is not only about recognising the importance of black history in our own country; we must look further, to the erasure of Atlantic Africa, for example, which has been written out of Renaissance history. And by understanding King Afonso I – and Kimpa Vita – we understand our own world better too. **H**

ILLUSTRATION BY FEMKE DE JONG

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series and his latest book is *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster, 2020). His Twitter handle is @mayavision

BBC



ANNIVERSARIES

DOMINIC SANDBROOK highlights events that took place at Christmas in history

17 DECEMBER 497 BC

Romans celebrate the first Saturnalia

The agricultural festival gives way to dancing and debauchery

Sometimes described as the Roman inspiration for Christmas, the festival of Saturnalia was first celebrated on 17 December 497 BC, to mark the inauguration of Rome's new Temple of Saturn.

In its early years, Saturnalia was essentially an agricultural festival, to thank the god Saturn for the bounties of the earth. But a major change came in 217 BC, after Rome's traumatic defeat by Carthage at the battle of Lake Trasimene. Clearly divine inspiration was needed, and the organisers decided to import religious customs from Greece. So in came large public banquets, sacrifices, dances and public chanting. And over time, it grew ever more elaborate.

By the first years of the Roman empire, Saturnalia had become a three-day affair, and later it sprawled over seven days. The usual strict formalities were abandoned, people exchanged gifts of dolls and candles, and slaves wore their masters' clothes. Under the emperor Domitian, there were even gladiatorial games in which women and dwarves took centre stage. "During my week," says Saturn in a poem by the second-century writer Lucian, "the serious is barred: no business allowed. Drinking and being drunk, noise and games and dice, appointing of kings and feasting of slaves, singing naked, clapping... an occasional ducking of corked faces in icy water – such are the functions over which I preside."

So is Christmas partly a disguised Saturnalia? Perhaps. Feasting, drinking and presents all sound very familiar!

A mosaic showing three slaves at the festival of Saturnalia, when social norms were suspended

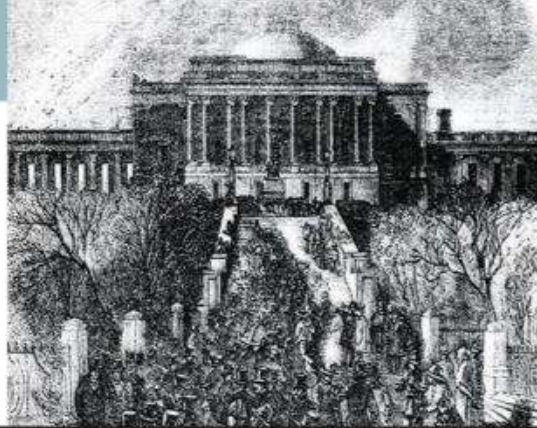


This 19th-century painting depicts the Decembrist revolt. The rebels protesting Nicholas I's ascendancy were violently dispelled



24 DECEMBER 1851

A fire breaks out at the **Library of Congress in Washington, DC**. Around 35,000 books – including almost two-thirds of the 6,487 books belonging to the late Thomas Jefferson – are destroyed.

**26 DECEMBER 1825**

The Decembrists are slaughtered

Nicholas I orders his artillery to open fire on a crowd of rebels

In St Petersburg, the morning of 26 December 1825 (14 December in the Old Style calendar) dawned dark and cold. Sunrise did not come until nine o'clock, and the mood was heavy with tension.

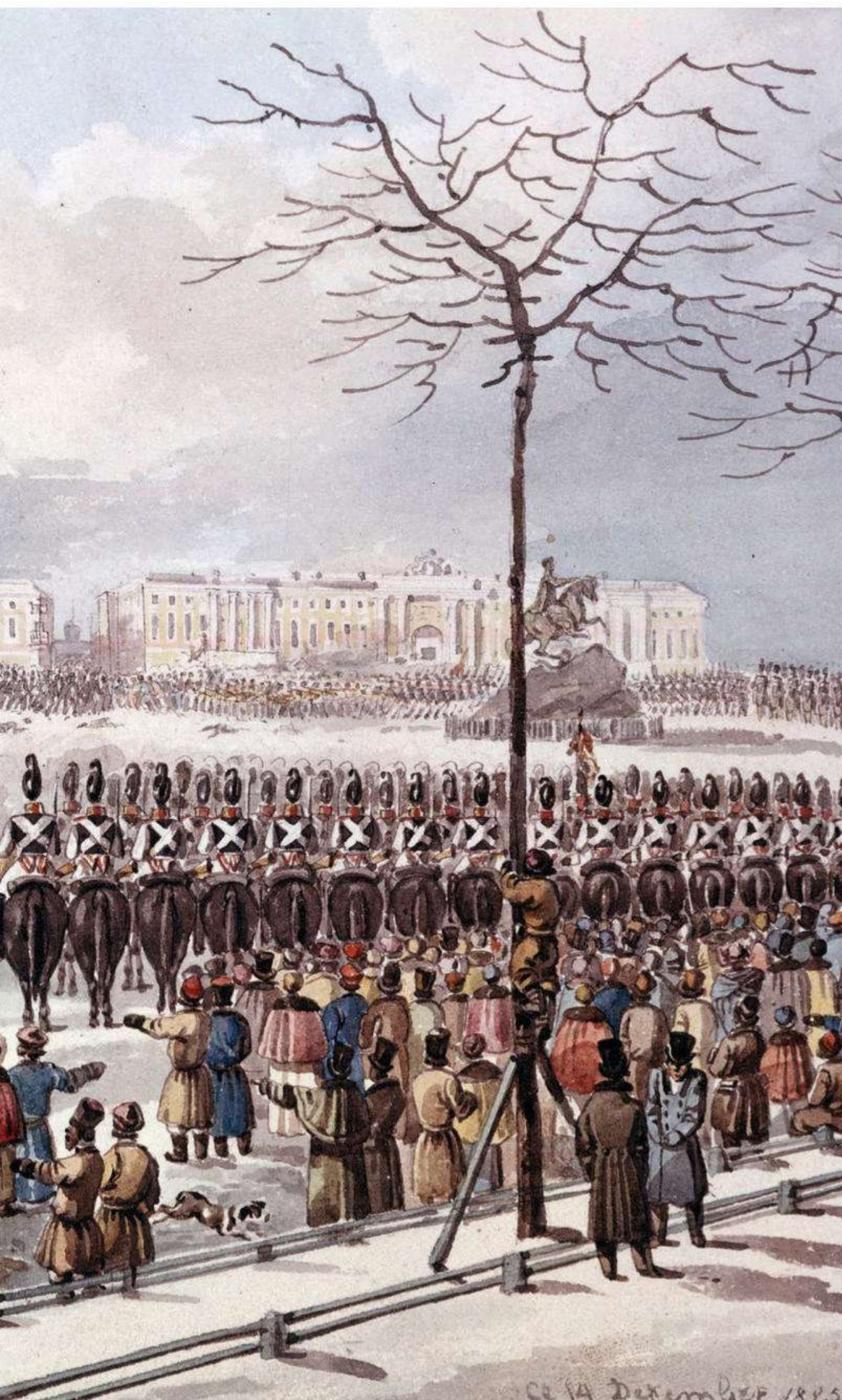
For weeks Russia had been locked in a constitutional crisis. On 1 December, Tsar Alexander I had died without an heir. The throne should have passed to his brother Constantine, viceroy of Poland, but he had renounced his right to the crown in 1820 when he married a woman with no royal blood. Constantine insisted, therefore, that his younger brother, Nicholas, should become tsar. Unfortunately, Nicholas was at first very ambivalent about taking the throne and originally swore an oath to Constantine as the new tsar.

As if all that were not convoluted enough, a group of aristocratic liberals and officers had united to form the Northern Society. Passionately dedicated to the idea of reform, they were deeply opposed to the accession of the conservative Nicholas. But by the evening of 25 December, Constantine had again rejected the crown, and Nicholas was poised to take power.

The next morning dawned with St Petersburg in chaos. While Nicholas and his supporters were scrambling to secure the generals' loyalty, some 3,000 soldiers assembled in the capital's Senate Square, chanting support for Constantine and demanding a constitution. Word soon spread, and a vast civilian crowd began to assemble, apparently sympathetic to the rebels. Visibly pale with nerves, Nicholas sent the capital's military governor to calm the soldiers, but a rebel shot him. The tsar then ordered a cavalry charge, but the horses slipped on the frozen cobbles.

In the end, Nicholas lost patience and ordered his artillery to fire on the crowd, and scores of people were killed. Nicholas's throne was safe. But in the Russian liberal imagination, the martyrdom of the Decembrists was remembered as the most heinous crime of the age. **H**

Dominic Sandbrook's latest book is *Who Dares Wins: Britain, 1979–1982* (Allen Lane, 2019)





HIDDEN HISTORIES

DAVID OLUSOGA explores lesser-known stories from our past

// The Victorians constructed a great empire of abstinence //

Although largely forgotten today, Victorian temperance was, at its height, one of the biggest and most influential movements in British history. While the more extreme of the many temperance societies sought a legal ban on the sale of alcohol, most temperance activists aimed merely to persuade their fellow citizens of the social ills that it caused.

From the 1830s onwards they persuaded millions to sign the temperance pledge, and commit to abstinence. Thousands of children joined the temperance youth organisation the Band of Hope. New members signed a pledge that read: "I do agree that I will not use intoxicating liquors as a beverage."

As well as condemning the 'Demon Drink' through a ceaseless stream of pamphlets, posters, marches and songs, the temperance movement set out to make it easier for people to keep their pledge by creating an alternative world in which those who had abandoned alcohol could socialise together. The first organised excursion in Britain was a temperance outing, a day trip from Leicester to Loughborough arranged, in 1841, for 500 temperance society members. The organiser was himself a committed temperance campaigner named Thomas Cook, the inventor of modern tourism.

Yet to loosen the grip that alcohol had on Victorian society, the temperance movement needed more than day trips. It had to take on one of the nation's most beloved institutions – the public house. To do this, the most forward-thinking among the temperance activists began

to open temperance bars – alcohol-free spaces that offered those who had pledged themselves to abstinence a place in which they could meet and talk, free from temptation.

Instead of beer, wines and spirits, the temperance bars offered cordials: sarsaparilla wine, dandelion and burdock, cream soda and ginger beer. Coca-Cola began as a temperance bar favourite. Considering most of these drinks were loaded with enormous quantities of sugar and syrup, we have to wonder whether some of the health benefits derived from eschewing alcohol might have been outweighed by the risk of diabetes.

As well as temperance bars there was also a fashion for milk taverns, which sold hot and cold milk and hot chocolate. They promoted themselves as places where the teetotalers of Britain's bustling industrial cities could enjoy a slice of rural simplicity.

As the temperance movement began to lose momentum in the first half of the 20th century, the temperance bars began to close down. In a twist of fate that would have horrified the pious temperance campaigners, some former temperance bars – the jewels in the great empire of abstinence they had built up – were eventually converted into pubs.

Until recently there was just one surviving temperance bar in the whole of Britain: Fitzpatrick's, which opened in the 1890s in Rawtenstall, Lancashire – the county that was the spiritual birthplace of the Victorian temperance movement. However, today Fitzpatrick's is not a lone relic because in recent years the temperance bar has undergone an unexpected revival.

Each January millions of people, nursing post-Christmas hangovers, commit to four weeks of abstinence. Dry January is a temporary fix. Yet what the research shows is that people who stop drinking for one month tend to reduce their drinking afterwards. Many turn to low-alcohol and no-alcohol beers and wines, drinks that have seen enormous increases in sales. Tapping into the rise of this new form of modern teetotalism, a new generation of alcohol-free bars has appeared.

With alcohol-free beer rather than sugary cordials, and without any of the Victorian proselytising, these 21st-century temperance bars are very different affairs. Yet they are still setting out to prove the same point the temperance movement wanted to establish almost two centuries ago – that it is possible to socialise without alcohol. **H**

High and dry

Non-alcoholic drinks line the shelves of Fitzpatrick's in the Lancashire town of Rawtenstall. This was, until recently, Britain's last remaining temperance bar, a vestige of the Victorian commitment to abstinence

David Olusoga

is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. His series *Britain's Forgotten Slave Owners* and *Black and British: A Forgotten History* are currently available on BBC iPlayer



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LETTERS

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Culture wars

It is always my favourite time of the month when *BBC History Magazine* arrives on the doorstep, and I was pleased to see some ancient history making an appearance in the November issue. I enjoyed Andrew Bayliss's account of Leonidas and the battle of Thermopylae (*Sparta's Last Stand*) – an episode that has always captured my imagination and that even helped inspire me to get into the field. However, I debated the truth of his final paragraph on the great works of literature and architecture that would “not have existed” if [Persian king] Xerxes had succeeded in his conquest.

The Persians themselves were keen on creating great feats of art and architecture, such as the great palaces at Persepolis. Yes, the content of plays and philosophy and the style of art may have been a bit different if Athens was a part of the Persian empire, but it wouldn't necessarily have made it any less ‘great’.

Laura Aitken-Burt, London



We reward the *Letter of the Month* writer with a copy of a new history book. This issue, that is **Thebes** by Paul Cartledge. You can read Tom Holland's nomination of it as a *Book of the Year* on page 75

Welcome arrivals

Alison Fell's account of the consequences of the influx of Belgian refugees to Britain in 1914 (*Welcome Guests?*, November) was highly educational. It occurred to me that an excellent illustration of the initial positive reaction to the arrival of the refugees would be a painting by Italian artist Fredo Franzoni, a Belgian refugee himself. *The Landing of the Belgian Refugees* (pictured right) shows the arrival of some of the thousands of Belgians who passed through Folkestone being welcomed by the mayor and other notables.

The town was even praised for the generous hospitality it showed to the refugees by Belgian king Albert, who declared that Folkestone had earned the admiration not only of the Belgians but of the whole world. It is sad to learn from Professor Fell's article that this hospitality was to be short-lived.

Susan Scullino, Romney Marsh

International crimefighter

In the excellent article on Belgian refugees in Britain we read that “in Britain today there are few traces of the Belgian refugees” who came in the First World War. Except, of course, on the shelves of every public library in the country – in the form of Hercule Poirot! Agatha Christie chronicles his arrival here as just such a refugee in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, first published in 1920.

Edward Peacock, Kent

History repeating

I read with great pleasure the interview with Seb Falk about medieval science (November). I got back into this period of history after reading Ian Mortimer's *The Time Traveller's Guide to Medieval England*. However, the interview got me thinking about the way in which we dismiss the medieval period as full of God-fearing, superstitious people. I wonder whether future generations will look back on our era of climate change and animal extinction and ask: ‘How could you let that happen?’ I will now go out and buy Falk's book to see how, in some ways, we are not so distant to the past at all.

Richard Tincknell, London

Japanese brutality

Sarah Kovner tells us in the November issue (*Authors on the Podcast*) that “there is nothing in the Japanese character or culture that led to the inhumane treatment of PoWs”. In my childhood in Cambridgeshire I met several survivors of Second World War Japanese PoW camps who would most certainly have disagreed with that statement,



and had nothing but bitterness and hatred toward the Japanese.

The Cambridgeshire Regiment were sent to Singapore just in time to surrender, then lost more than 700 lives after January 1942. The PoW camp survivors told me that the Japanese code of *bushido* taught that the ultimate disgrace was to surrender, and that anyone who does so gives up their right to life. That, they told me, was the explanation for the widespread personal and institutional sadism, which saw prisoners beaten and starved to death and Red Cross parcels and medicines being withheld.

The refusal to surrender is demonstrated not only by the American struggle to take every Pacific island, when Japanese troops fought to the last, but also the mass civilian suicides. It may be argued that inhumane treatment of those who have surrendered is not true *bushido*, but the survivors I knew believed it had that outcome. By manipulating *bushido*, as well as perceptions of their enemies' history and culture, to motivate their troops, it seems the Japanese unleashed an evil that it is difficult to understand in hindsight.

Nick Ellwood, Gloucestershire

Classroom inspirations

Many thanks to the team and particularly the authors of the features on both Abbot



American PoWs after the 1942 battle of Java. Reader Nick Ellwood points to the cruelty of Japanese camps

GETTY IMAGES



Italian painter Fredo Franzoni's *The Landing of the Belgian Refugees*, which reader Susan Scullino suggests aptly captures the warm welcome given to Belgian refugees in First World War Britain

Hadrian in Anglo-Saxon England (Michael Wood, October 2020), and William the Conqueror as a war criminal (Marc Morris, November 2019). As a history teacher, I have found them to be great inspirations.

My Year 7s enjoyed the story of Hadrian and, those of African origin particularly, the notion that he brought Christianity to a people "worshipping sticks and stones" – turning that later colonial notion on its head. I also look forward to enlivening the standard lessons on the Norman conquest with the question asked and using the concept of a 'war criminal' as a means of investigating anachronistic terms.

Keep up the good work!
Paul Giannini, Doncaster

Charitable collections

I was disappointed to read about the funding problems that institutions such as the National Trust are experiencing due to coronavirus (*News*, November). It is perhaps time for all such charities to come under one umbrella. Help the Aged and Age Concern merged to form a more robust organisation, and perhaps our heritage bodies – such as the National Trust, English Heritage, Historic Scotland and the Landmark Trust – need to do the same. It could be called National Heritage, but split up into four regions: National Heritage Wales, National Heritage Scotland, and so on. Money would be saved on marketing and publicity, staffing and technology, and it would possibly draw more visitors as membership would offer access to a greater number of attractions.

Pam Blair, Lincolnshire

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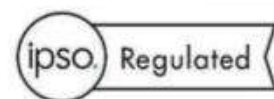
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Force for good

Far from being a tyrant, Richard III was a progressive policy-maker who sought to improve the lot of the lower classes, Matt Lewis argues



RICHARD THE RADICAL

For centuries Richard III has been cast as a diabolical despot who would stop at nothing in pursuit of power. But, argues **Matt Lewis**, in reality Richard was a champion of the common man – and it was this that ultimately led to his downfall

On 1 October 1472, Richard Williamson was on his way back from Riccall, near York, to his home in Howden. As he waited for the Barnaby ferry, he was set upon brutally by three brothers who cut off both his hands, severed one arm at the elbow, hamstringing him, robbed him of all he had and left him at the roadside to die. His widow, Katherine, managed to get the case heard in parliament because her local lord, the younger brother of King Edward IV, had taken an interest (and he would later campaign to bring the murderers to justice, as part of his attempts to cast out corruption).

More than a decade later, that brother – then Richard, Duke of Gloucester – would become King Richard III, one of England’s most controversial monarchs. Although the Williamson case happened before he was king, it helps to scratch beneath the surface of what was going on in Richard’s only parliament, held between 23 January and 20 February 1484. It is a thread that allows us to stitch together an image of a progressive king whose policies caused his downfall. Not because he was a tyrant. Quite the opposite.

Richard had not been groomed for kingship from birth. He was the youngest son of Richard, 3rd Duke of York. Born in 1452, his childhood was a rough ride through the early Wars of the Roses. His family was dispossessed in 1459, then restored in 1460 when his father was made heir to Henry VI – making Richard suddenly fifth in line to the throne. By the end of that year, his father and brother Edmund were dead, and in the early months of 1461 his oldest brother deposed Henry VI to become the first Yorkist king, Edward IV. Richard, now second in line to the throne, was made Duke of Gloucester on 1 November 1461, aged nine.

Although Edward initially seemed to plan to set Richard up in the South West, the rebellion led by their cousin Richard Neville, the Earl of Warwick, in 1469–70 changed the political landscape. Warwick held the vast Neville lands in the north of England but fell out with Edward, drove him from the throne and replaced him with Henry VI – only for Edward to return in 1471, with Richard’s help, to win back his crown. Richard married Warwick’s younger daughter, Anne Neville, and became the dominant power in northern England from the early 1470s. He had plenty of authority in the region and carved out a reputation for keeping the troublesome border with Scotland quiet as well as for providing good lordship to the area. By 1483, Richard was the most powerful nobleman in England. That year was one of seismic



Righteous ruler

A late 15th-century drawing of Richard III and his wife, Anne. When the pair married in 1472, Richard became the dominant force in northern England and gained a reputation for providing good lordship to the region

upheaval that would see him become king. But the supposed Damascene change in the 30-year-old to become a scheming, murdering despot is, in many ways, a myth.

As part of the story of Richard III, the parliament of 1484 is often glossed over. Traditional history will paint it as the wheels of government grinding away, detached from the monarch, or as a desperate bid for popularity to maintain an already slipping grip on the crown. Either way, it is inconceivable not only that Richard did some good but that he planned to do much more.

Yet Sir Francis Bacon, lord chancellor from 1618–21, was comfortable describing Richard III as “a good lawmaker for the ease and solace of the common people”. Meanwhile, a striking number of the acts of Richard’s parliament are worthy of remark compared to his predecessors and successors, who often viewed parliament as a necessary evil. For them, it was a tax-raising mechanism that required some lubrication by offers to reform the monarch’s behaviour. Richard saw it as something very different and utterly vital. Parliament was a direct link to his people and a vessel through which he could serve them. That might not sound like the thoughts of the child-killing, murderous, usurping tyrant that traditional history has bequeathed to us, but it can be easily demonstrated.

Champion of justice

Among the bills passed by parliament in 1484 are several that deal with matters of justice. The abolition of benevolences is perhaps the clearest place to see a bid for political backing. They were a hated form of taxation – effectively requiring a gift to the crown – invented by Edward IV in the lead-up to his invasion of France in 1475. The old king had kept them as a convenient way to raise cash without having to go through the hassle, and associated accountability, of asking parliament for taxation. Removing them from the royal playbook was undoubtedly popular with the wealthy, the kind of men from whom a king needed support. It was also financially dangerous, and parliament approved of the clear statement of the king’s aim to live within his means.

But Richard’s reasoning for abolishing benevolences was more nuanced than a simple snatch at easy popularity with the elite. They were inequitable – entirely at the whim of the king in timing and amount demanded – and equity was of paramount importance to the legally talented and socially aware Richard. He had taken a stand against fishgarths (industrial, river-blocking fish traps) in the north for the same reason: they were inequitable and indiscriminate.

Other kings viewed parliament as a necessary evil, but Richard saw it as utterly vital

Fishy enterprise

This c1407 vignette shows a man catching fish. Richard strongly opposed fishgarths, as the wealthy nobility who operated these traps exploited them for their own gain



Hero of the people

Peasants are dressed as reapers and gleaners in an image based on an illustration in a medieval manuscript. From legal aid to taxation, many of Richard III's reforms were driven by his commitment to protecting the poor and vulnerable, writes Matt Lewis

There, he had challenged the will of those who operated the traps – exclusively the wealthier gentry and nobility – at the expense of the poorer men downstream and those trying to navigate waterways. In 1484, his interests happened to align with those of more affluent subjects, but they were still a continuation of his broader interest in justice. Edward had used benevolences to circumvent parliament and its pesky demands for reform and accountability. Here was Richard removing that easy avenue, promising that he would take the harder road of working with the Commons. If powerful men were relieved by the new law, it was a coincidence.

Richard's concern for the common man and disdain for the social norms of his age are clear to see in the acts of his parliament. It is a thread that runs, uncut, from his time as Duke of Gloucester. The Williamson case came to parliament in the 1470s because the murderers' father, Thomas Farnell, had entered Richard's service. He planned to secure the kind of protection from legal consequences that those serving powerful nobles relied on and get his sons into service to ensure immunity for them.

By the 15th century, the system of livery and maintenance that had begun as a code of brotherhood to bind knights together had become corrupted. Nobles assembled vast private armies who wore their livery, the badge that identified them as lord's man, in return for maintenance, which used to mean food and lodgings, but now often meant protection from the legal consequences of crimes and the freedom to indulge in thugery and corruption.

A man of principles

Instead of accepting the killers and swelling his affinity, Richard ordered for the father to be sent to jail in York to await trial, and the bill asked parliament in 1472 to order the three sons to surrender or be found guilty in their absence. The request was granted, and the brothers were to appear before the court of King's Bench, the highest criminal court in England. The act stated that if they were to fail to appear, they "shall stand and be convicted and attainted of the said felonies, murder and robberies". Thomas was delivered for trial, but he secured bail after four months in Newgate Gaol. He was tried by



Judgment day

The King's Bench during Henry VI's reign. Richard broke with tradition when he refused to give immunity to three murderers whose father was in his service and ordered them to appear before this court instead



jury a couple of months later and acquitted, meaning Katherine, Williamson's widow, was fined 6s 8d for wrongly accusing him. His sons never came to trial, despite five proclamations issued at Howden through the 1470s summoning them. They were convicted in their absence but were never brought to justice for the murder.

Casting out corruption

Richard also championed bail reforms, which sought to root out corrupt practices that fell heaviest on the poorest. However, he did not, as is sometimes claimed, invent bail. The system appears in 1275 in the Statute of Westminster. In 1484, parliament described people being "arrested and imprisoned for suspicion of felony, sometimes of malice, and sometimes of light suspicion, and so kept in prison without bail". Local officials were arresting those accused of crimes, often on little or no evidence, and sometimes on malicious charges, and denying them their right to bail. Richard gave justices the power to correct this by granting bail to anyone they found had been denied it wrongfully.

The second part of the reform was even more clearly in line with Richard's desire to see equity and fairness. The act provided that no goods could be seized "before that same person, so arrested and imprisoned, be convicted". Some officials had been taking an accused's assets at the time of arrest and failing to return them, so a malicious charge might ruin a person. Not only was this made illegal, but the fine for continuing the practice was double the value of the goods taken, paid to the person from whom they were seized.

Jury composition received attention from



Cut from a different cloth

A merchant measures fabric in a late 15th/early 16th-century painting. Richard penalised all foreign traders, but Italians were treated particularly harshly



Laying down the law This 15th-century miniature shows a scene from the 1471 battle of Tewkesbury. During Richard's reign, Lombards faced draconian measures for importing poor-quality bow staves into England, as part of a series of restrictions on foreign merchants

Richard's parliament, too. The measures may sound harsh to a modern ear when all are eligible for jury service, but they were a response to more evidence of corruption. Parliament heard of the injustices caused "by untrue verdicts given in inquisitions and enquiries before sheriffs in their turns, by persons of no substance nor behaviour, not dreading God nor the world's shame". Juries were being bought or bullied into returning a desired verdict. The new law required all jurors to hold freehold land worth 20s a year in the same county as the court sat, with a fine of 40s for every unqualified juror appointed. This benefited the poorest at the expense of those able to buy justice: wealthier jurors could not be bribed to give certain verdicts as easily as poorer jurors could.

The problem with viewing Richard's parliament as no more than the working of government is that the measures are clearly in line with his long-held interests. Painting it as a desperate bid for popularity is untenable, too. Traditionally, parliament was a place where a king might ingratiate himself to those with the power to keep him on the throne. It meant bolstering the nobility and local gentry, turning a blind eye to the corruption that lined their pockets in order to buy their support. This parliament showed no signs of that at all.

Richard established an early form of legal aid, meant to provide access to the courts for those unable to afford it. The Court of Requests (a function of the Privy Council that slashed the costs of accessing legal help and sped up the process too) may have picked up threads that were already dangling around, but in December 1483, just before

parliament opened, Richard sought to formalise it. Richard appointed a clerk with responsibility for processing applications so that those usually prevented from seeking legal redress by the cost and timescale involved could now obtain justice. It is a measure firmly in line with Richard's previous actions and interest in justice for the common man. Those who benefited most were the lower ranks of society, an ill-treated class Richard had long been interested in supporting. Giving them more rights and greater equity meant dragging power away from those further up the social ladder, alienating those whose support a floundering, desperate king would most need.

The other focus of the public bills enacted in 1484 was trade, and the potential for a far-reaching plan can be discerned in them.

English merchants could see plenty to encourage them in Richard's parliament. Foreign traders were to pay around twice the duty on imports and exports that their English counterparts owed. They were also prohibited from importing a whole raft of items, including saddles, caps, gloves and blades. Italian merchants were singled out for special attention because Richard viewed them as a financial and security threat. They were legally required to sell all of their goods at wholesale prices to English subjects by 1 May 1485. With the proceeds of their sales, they had to buy English goods or forfeit their cash before leaving the kingdom.

England's protector

The Lombards of northern Italy were the focus of even more draconian measures. Parliament heard about "the seditious confederacy of the Lombards", importing low-quality bow staves and charging £8 per 100 instead of the old rate of 40s. This, parliament insisted, was a matter of national security, risking the military strength of English armies in the field. A new law required the import of 10 bowstaves of the correct quality with every barrel of malmsey or tyre (sweet wines enjoyed by the nobility) to ensure the English longbow remained a fearsome and reliable weapon. A fine of 13s 4d was set for every barrel not accompanied by suitable bowstaves. Interestingly, the one thing excluded from these isolationist and xenophobic measures was the book trade – something Richard, who had an extensive and well-thumbed personal library, nurtured.

These trade measures aimed to light a fire under the English economy, which had

Those who benefited most were the lower ranks of society, a class Richard had long been keen to support



Embittered gentry

The battle of Bosworth, which saw Henry Tudor best Richard III. Many of the nobles whom Richard had alienated with his reforms took to the field against him

begun to pick up in the later years of Edward's rule after years of stagnation in the wake of the end of the Hundred Years' War and then the Wars of the Roses.

The focus on improving the position of merchants, alongside the measures that increased the justice available to those at the bottom of the social ladder, may hint at a larger scheme. The problems that had dogged England in the second half of the 15th century were exacerbated by the nobility's use of the broken system of livery and maintenance to build substantial private armies. As much as it was a dynastic battle for the crown, the Wars of the Roses was a set of local feuds, between the Neville and Percy families, the Courtney and Bonville families, the Duke of Norfolk and the Paston family, and more. These local disputes were the fuel that kept the fires of civil war burning, and Richard may have seen a cure for the kingdom's ills.

During his second reign, Edward IV had created hardly any new noblemen despite the decimation of the Wars of the Roses. Richard gave John Howard the dukedom of Norfolk which was rightfully his, but otherwise followed his brother's policy. Henry VII would continue in the same vein. If there was a feeling that the old nobility, the old ways of doing things, were the problem, Richard might have seen a solution in the merchant classes. Self-made men, used to hard work, who would have no intention of wasting their money on retaining large armies, could offer the perfect foil to the gentry and nobility who were undermined by so much of parliament's work in 1484. It might have been a sign of the political significance of early capitalism.

During his time as Duke of Gloucester, Richard had petitioned his brother the king for tax concessions for northern merchants and tried to establish a continental presence for them to rival that of London, so even this interest was not new. If there was a plan, these men would be needed to help lay a shoulder against the crumbling old structures of society and begin to shove them over, perhaps even to replace them. And parliament's mercantile favour could only have encouraged them to align with Richard.

Alienated elites

In October 1483, it had been the gentry of the South East that had rebelled against Richard III's rule. At Bosworth, it was more of the same men, many intimately associated with Edward IV's government, who would take to the field against the king. Tradition holds that they did so in disgust at the thought that Richard had murdered his nephews, the princes in the Tower. Given that they were the very class most affected by Richard's deter-

mined efforts to drive out corruption, it is more likely they acted in self-interest as Richard's policies disrupted their lucrative and comfortable lives. In parliament, Richard had criticised his brother for "delighting in adulation and flattery" and being surrounded by "persons insolent, vicious, and of inordinate avarice". When he wrote to the bishops in March 1484, he insisted "our principal intent and fervent desire is to see virtue and cleanness of living to be advanced, increased and multiplied, and vices and all other things repugnant to virtue, provoking the high indignation and fearful displeasure of God to be repressed and annulled".

His parliament was never about a desperate bid for support. It was about fairness, equality, justice and equity. Richard pursued these ends even though they alienated him from the precise classes whose support he needed. It was admirable, but a mistake: a miscalculation that probably cost Richard his crown and his life. The parliament of 1484 was about many things, but it was not a calculated bid to prop up a floundering king. Richard was, perhaps, a victim of his progressive policies; of his determination to reshape a kingdom, to make it better; and of men who had too much of a vested interest in the status quo to allow that to happen. **H**

Matt Lewis is a historian, author and law graduate. His books include *Richard III: Loyalty Binds Me* (Amberley, 2018). He also appears on our podcast series, *The Princes in the Tower*. To listen to all eight episodes, go to historyextra.com/princes

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BRIDGEMAN

His parliament was never a desperate bid for support. It was about fairness, equality and justice



Never-ending story Gary Oldman plays Winston Churchill in the 2018 Oscar winner *Darkest Hour*. The Second World War “remains the story we cannot stop telling ourselves”, writes Alec Ryrie. “Fiction, film and TV circle around its carcass like vultures”

Our dangerous devotion to the Second World War

The west’s enduring obsession with the battle against Nazism is hampering its efforts to meet the challenges of the modern world

BY **ALEC RYRIE**

Accompanies
the BBC Radio 4
Archive on 4 episode
Our Sacred Story



In 1947, the American radio network ABC began broadcasting a series called, modestly, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. It ran for nearly 10 years, was aired in more than 50 countries, and spawned a novel and,

eventually, an epic, star-studded movie. That teasing, irresistible title was an allusion to a poem called *Tell Me the Old, Old Story*, written by an Englishwoman in 1866, which had been set to music the following year and had become a popular hymn.

The story that both titles referenced, and which neither of them needed to name, was the story of Jesus Christ: still, up to the mid-20th century, the defining sacred story in British, American and western culture. It was a story that was told and retold not because it was unfamiliar, but because it was so deeply familiar. Earnest Christian believers were a minority in both Europe and America, but wholehearted believers, nominal adherents and assertive unbelievers alike recognised the story's power. Whether or not they believed he was God incarnate, Jesus Christ was their culture's most potent moral figure.

Yet even by the time the film was released in 1965, that was no longer exactly so. Its global box-office of \$12.1m covered little more than half of its vast production costs; critics slated it as tedious, partly on account of its four-hour running time. It is now best remembered for John Wayne's unintentionally comic cameo as the centurion at Calvary. Reverence was no longer the order of the day.

Since then there's been a common lament from cultural conservatives that we no longer have shared sacred narratives that hold our societies together: we can no longer agree on what the greatest story ever told might be. This is, supposedly, a sign of our fragmenting values.

But this is not true. We do have a new shared narrative: the event that the French novelist Laurent Binet calls "our Trojan War: a landmark, a reference, a source of inexhaustible stories, a collection of epics and tragedies". In fact the Second World War is even more than that. It is the defining moral event of our times, the sacred story of a secular age.

Our culture's most potent moral figure is no longer Jesus Christ: it is Adolf Hitler.

Once Jesus taught us what was good; now Hitler teaches us what is evil.

To call someone a Nazi is the ultimate moral insult. Our modern ethical consensus was summed up by that great philosopher Indiana Jones: "Nazis! I hate these guys."

Perhaps we still believe that Jesus is good, but not with the same fervour and conviction that we believe Nazism is evil.

Crosses and crucifixes have lost most of their power in our culture: you can play with them, even joke about them, and no one *really* minds. But you don't play with swastikas.

And fair enough. If you're going to pick one human ideology to represent absolute evil, I challenge you to find a better candidate. But the swap is a momentous one. Our sacred story used to be religious; now it's secular. And it used to be a positive example; now it's a negative one. How did this happen? And what are the consequences?

The western allies fought the Second World War not just as a desperate struggle for survival, but as a crusade for a newly invented entity called 'Judaean-Christian civilisation'. The Atlantic Charter of 1941, which laid the basis for the whole postwar legal and moral order, presented the war as a struggle to defend human rights – including the freedom of worship, regardless of religion. Allied soldiers were told that they were fighting the forces of evil.

They did not necessarily believe it. There had been similar propaganda in 1914. But as they entered Germany and liberated Dachau and Bergen-Belsen, and as the newsreel footage made its way around the world, it became clear that Allied propaganda had been an understatement, not an exaggeration.

The American GI Paul Fussell, who gave full voice to the cynicism of his fellow-soldiers in Europe in 1944–45, recalled that everything changed when they reached Buchenwald: "They had seen and smelled the death camps, and now they were able to realise that all along they had been... fighting for something positive, the sacredness of life itself... After the camps, a moral attitude was rampant... The boys' explosive little tour in France had been a crusade after all."

Plenty of armies are told they are fighting the forces of evil. Just this once, it turned out to be true.

After the war a new, secular framework of international law and human rights was created, via the Nuremberg trials in 1945–46 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. But it took a while for this new framework to soak into the wider culture. To begin with the war was remembered in nationalistic and heroic terms: British war films were tales of stoic endurance (*The Cruel Sea*, 1953), or simply rip-roaring adventures (*Ice Cold in Alex*, 1958). In politics, the great lesson learned from the war was the folly of appeasement: a lesson that led directly to the Suez fiasco in 1956 and which left Kennedy with terrifyingly little

The life of Jesus Christ, shown in a painting from 1460, was the defining sacred story of western culture until – says Alec Ryrie – it was supplanted by the Second World War



room for manoeuvre during the Cuban crisis in 1962.

But as the postwar generation began to grow up, as it became possible to look directly at the deeper wounds the war had inflicted, the mood began to shift. This was not only because events like the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, and the *Spiegel* affair (the scandal that first prompted West Germany to reckon seriously with its totalitarian past) in 1962 forced a reckoning with the memory of the war. The massacre of 69 black protesters against apartheid at Sharpeville in South Africa in 1960, and the contemporaneous civil rights movement in the United States, showed that evils that resonated with Nazi racial ideology were still destroying lives a decade and a half after Hitler's suicide. The war had been won, but it was not over.

The memorialisation of the war has not slackened over the following decades. It remains the story we cannot stop telling ourselves: fiction, film and TV circle around its carcass like vultures, and we never tire of it. Have you ever heard any one snatch of audio repeated as often as Chamberlain's broadcast of 3 September 1939 informing the nation that we were at war? And yet, though repetition ought to have dulled it, though I was born more than 30 years after Chamberlain died, it still turns my spine to water every time I hear it. My children watch the newest cinematic retellings of the war's story transfixed and are hungry for more. As are we all.

The retellings keep coming, but their mood has darkened, the evils of Nazism and of the Holocaust coming to the fore. Boy's-own adventures have been displaced by *Schindler's List*, *The Pianist* and *La Vita è Bella*. And even the way the Holocaust story is told has changed, as films like *Defiance* or the revenge-fantasy *Inglourious Basterds* gave power and agency to those who had long been seen simply as victims.

Meanwhile, as the war neared the edge of living memory, the cultural power of that memory only grew. Nazism became the ultimate reference point for evil. Godwin's Law – the rule that all online arguments eventually end with someone calling someone else a Nazi – did not arise by accident. In a culture generally committed to relativism, this is the one fixed reference point, the one absolute on which everything else hangs. Contrarians and shock-merchants generally understand that this is a line they may not cross. Ken Livingstone's long political career of rule-breaking may have convinced him that there was nothing he could say that could go too far. But it turned out that there *was* one thing, as he discovered after claiming, in 2016, that Hitler supported Zionism.

An apologist for Stalin's or Mao's purges, or a 9/11 'truth-er', is merely deluded. A Holocaust-denier, by contrast, is an intolerable monster. And rightly so, because in our cultural context such a claim is never an innocent historical mistake. It is always, always a deliberate attempt to



Abiding evil Black South Africans run from police gunfire during the Sharpeville massacre of 1960. The killing of 69 protesters in the Transvaal served as a reminder that violently racist ideologies had not been expunged with the defeat of Nazism

justify the unjustifiable. Holocaust-denial is our modern equivalent of blasphemy: words that deny the deepest moral truth our society is built on, and that we know are never spoken in innocence.

And yet, building our new secular morality around a specific historical event is problematic. Memories fade, and simply telling each other the old, old story may not be enough. So we have taken the next step, and translated the story into a new, timeless mode.

To many people it is incongruous, even embarrassing, that the 20th century's bestselling work of fiction is an excessively long, unapologetically archaic and sometimes self-indulgent fairy tale written by a philologist who was a very traditional Catholic, and whose most devoted readers were and remain teenage boys. But even if you share the disdain for JRR Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, there is no gainsaying its cultural importance. Tolkien himself had no patience for allegory as a literary form, and vigorously denied that he had written one, but if the War of the Ring does not mirror the Second World War which was raging as he wrote the book, it certainly refracts it.

He privately admitted as much. Tolkien was an early and staunch opponent of Nazism, but he was also a veteran of the battle of the Somme, and knew that the Second World War was,

“Crosses and crucifixes have lost most of their power in our culture: you can play with them, even joke about them. But you don't play with swastikas

Germ warfare

Central London – with the Old Bailey top, centre – in the wake of a German air raid, September 1940. Invocations of the Blitz spirit didn't stop Covid-19 killing more Londoners in April 2020 than did the Luftwaffe in any single month of the Second World War



Ring master

JRR Tolkien in his study at Oxford, 1955. *The Lord of the Rings'* narrative arc may have refracted the Second World War, but only the fictional conflict, Tolkien noted, could be won with moral purity

Dark role model

Lord Voldemort (played by Ralph Fiennes) represents unalloyed evil in 2011's *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2*. From Sauron and Darth Vader to JK Rowling's Dark Lord, the west's most popular modern mythologies are studded with ersatz Hitlers

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like any war, “an ultimately evil job”, as he told his son in 1944. And he used the language of his own developing myth to explain what he meant: not only that there were “a great many Orcs on our side”, but that “we are attempting to conquer Sauron with the Ring”. Such a war might end in victory, but a victory whose effect would be “to breed new Saurons”. Only his mythical war could be won with moral purity.

But if we are using the war’s memory to set our moral compasses, then mythical, clear-cut versions of it are exactly what we need, and that is what Tolkien gave us. We have been breeding new Saurons ever since. The figure of the Dark Lord has stalked through the most persistent and popular mythologies of the postwar era, from *Star Wars’* Darth Vader to *Harry Potter’s* Lord Voldemort. The debt these ersatz Hitlers owe to their real-world archetype is sometimes implied, sometimes openly acknowledged, but always plain. Both George Lucas and JK Rowling have been quite open about the fact.

These are the myths on which generations of children in the post-Christian west have been raised, transposing and cleansing the brutal lessons of the Second World War into timeless morality tales. It is a lesson our culture seems determined to teach itself and eager repeatedly to relearn: that this is what true evil looks like, even though in reality evil rarely appears in such unambiguous dress.

This transposition has all kinds of advantages, allowing the myth to evolve and to purify itself. Even to eat itself: you can condemn Churchill’s imperialism and the queasy racial politics of Tolkien’s world, even while you take your bearings from the moral universe that they have created for you. But self-cannibalism is not usually a good sign. There are reasons to suspect that our new sacred story is running into problems.

For one thing, the jump from Jesus to Hitler takes us from a positive to a negative exemplar. We know what evil is, but we’re no longer very sure what goodness is. We know what we hate, but not what we love. Condemning evil is a part of any ethical system, but perhaps we should devote more energy to finding something we can see as good.

At the same time, our new, Nazi-based concept of evil risks being inadequate. Yes, racism, militarism, patriarchy, authoritarianism and genocide are evil. But they are not the only evils. Knowing that we are against them will not do much to help us stop, say, the climate crisis, or the entrenchment of inequality.

Or a global pandemic. It has been bleakly comic, in 2020, to see how much western countries – none more than Britain – have tried to understand this crisis through the prism of the Second World War. We frantically invoke the spirit of a Blitz that almost none of us can remember. But viruses are not Nazis. This is not an enemy whose morale we can break, or who is trying to break ours.

We have been, as the saying goes, fighting the last war: we brought a Spitfire to a germ fight. And so a heroic national effort built Nightingale hospitals that it turned out we did not quite need; a new Dunkirk spirit signed up three-quarters of a million volunteers that it turned out we couldn’t use; and who knows if our new Bletchley Park boffins will actually crack the viral code and develop a war-winning vaccine. Meanwhile, none of our myths stopped us emptying hospital wards into care homes, which many believe resulted in thousands of preventable deaths. Nor did they save London from enduring, in April 2020, a month more deadly than any the Luftwaffe ever managed.

Not all villains wear skulls on their uniforms. Many – most? – evils are slyer and subtler than that; they are often rooted inside us. We cannot defeat them by jumping in a Spitfire and blowing things up. And our anti-Nazi values do not give us much wisdom on how to tackle them.

Worst of all, this modern ethical consensus is not stable. How could it be? It rests on intuition: a gut feeling that racism, cruelty and genocide are wrong – lessons we originally learned from our religious traditions and from bitter experience. Those truths are not, sadly, self-evident. Lots of human societies down the ages have rejected them. We try to shore up our intuitions by retelling the tales, by trumpeting them ever more stridently, and by pillorying anyone we suspect of questioning them. In the process we risk simply making them more brittle and more alienating.

There is not much reason to believe this will work. Indeed, we risk conjuring the very evils we fear back into life. As authoritarian populists all over the world have learned, there is no better way to get everyone’s attention than to play footsie with fascism.

It looks, in other words, as if our new, post-Christian value system is starting to fail. So as we hunker down for what looks like it will be a long, dark winter, here’s a problem to muse on to while away the time. Where are more stable, durable and nourishing values for our culture going to come from? In the past, they’ve often arisen out of catastrophic events – such as, for example, the bloodiest war in human history. If you come up with a better alternative, please let the rest of us know. **H**

Alec Ryrie is professor of the history of Christianity at Durham University. He presented the BBC Radio 4 *Archive on 4* episode *Our Sacred Story*, which is available on BBC Sounds

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“When it comes to coronavirus, we have been, as the saying goes, fighting the last war: bringing a Spitfire to a germ fight

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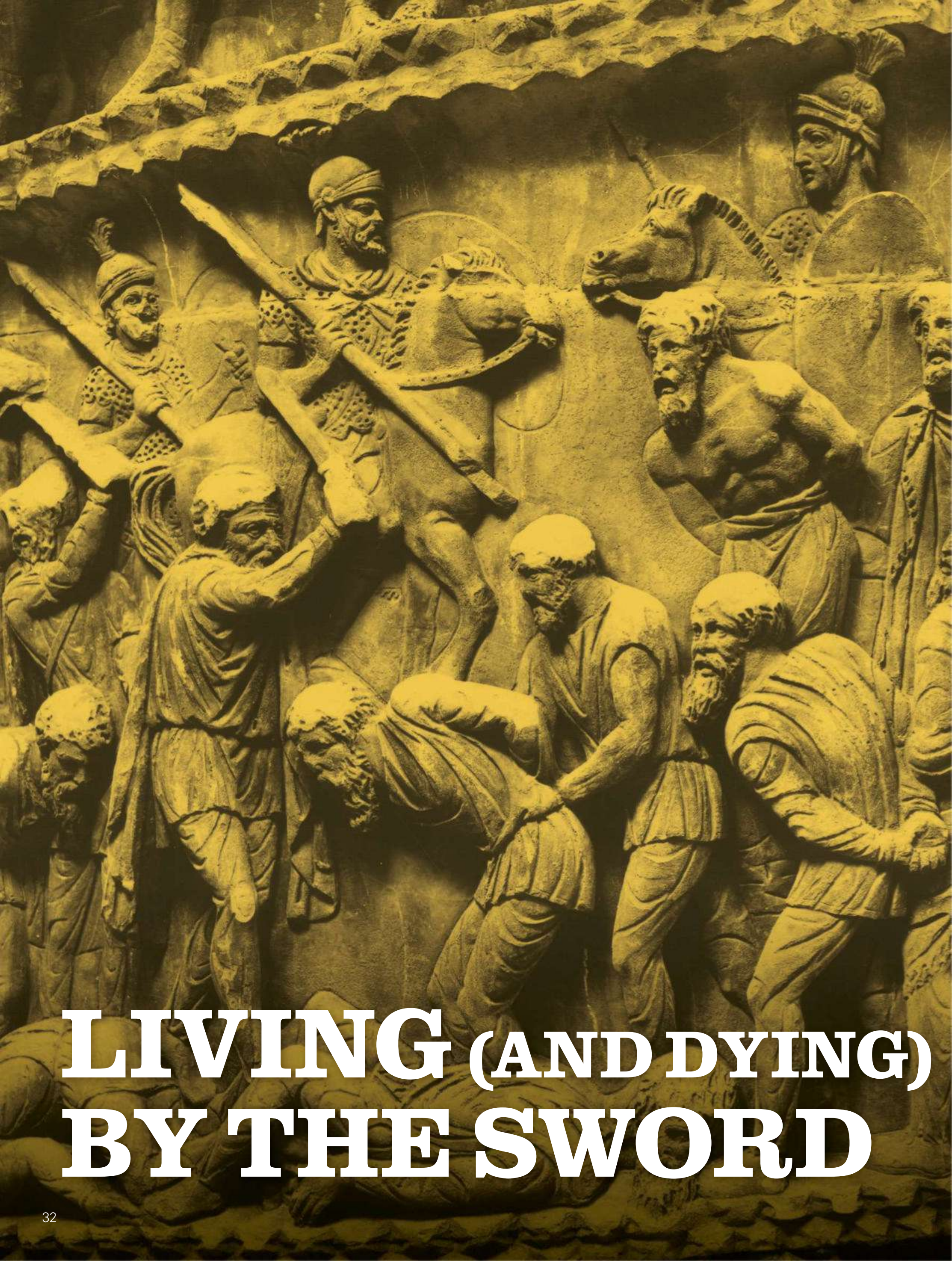
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LIVING (AND DYING) BY THE SWORD



This second-century AD column shows Romans beheading German nobles. Armed with the lethal gladius (short sword), Roman soldiers were feared throughout the empire

The beat of Roman soldiers' boots echoed throughout every corner of the empire – but what was it like to serve in the legions? Over the page, **Guy de la Bédoyère** delves into the vast archive these soldiers left behind and presents 10 snapshots of life in the ancient world's most powerful military force

Today, the Roman army is remembered as the mightiest fighting machine that the ancient world had ever seen. And with good reason. But it took centuries to grow into the ferocious force that would strike fear into peoples spread across a sprawling empire.

In its earliest days, Rome's army was raised on an as-need basis from the citizenry based on property qualifications. At the top came men who could provide a horse, right down to the ordinary soldiers, or legionaries, who could afford only a sword. It required Rome's first two Punic Wars against Carthage in the third century BC for the Roman army to develop into the military behemoth that dominated the ancient world.

As the army's power grew, the number of men who served in it ballooned. In the Republic, numbers had varied according to requirements. They were mainly in the tens of thousands until the Late Republic (c104–31 BC), when Rome's warring generals raised vast forces to pursue their political ambitions. Under the emperors (27 BC–AD 337), the numbers rocketed from around 250,000 to 450,000, made up of citizen legionaries in the 5,000-strong legions and provincial auxiliaries in roughly equal numbers.

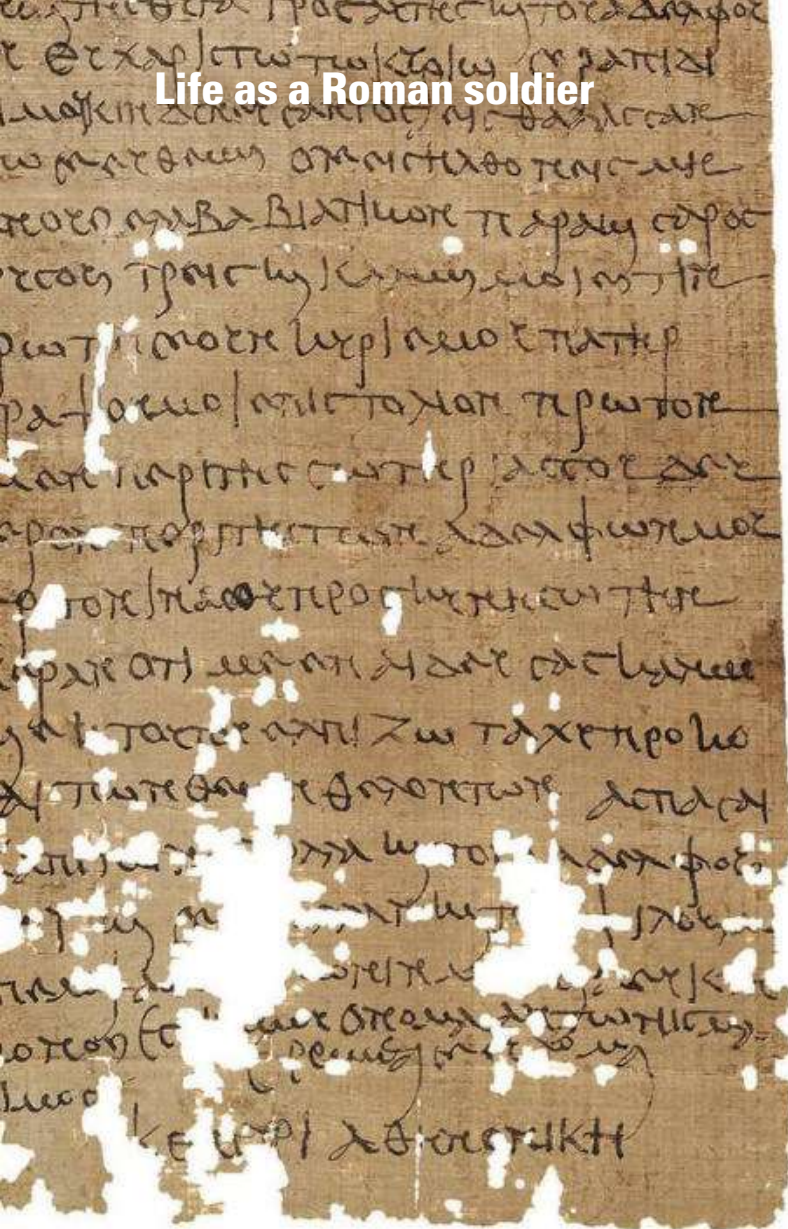
But the Roman army was about much more than war. It was almost the only means by which the Roman state exercised its power. Soldiers erected forts, built aqueducts, acted as bodyguards, policed civilians, managed quarries and prisons, and collected taxes. They also had families, petitioned the emperor, marched on campaign, committed acts of great valour and atrocities, and worshipped their gods. Some died from disease, enemy action, or

accidents. Others lived to sign on again as veterans, or retired to find their way in civilian life.

Yet despite its many roles in Roman society, the army is still best remembered for its military might. So how did the force manage to be so successful? It wasn't immune to defeat – far from it. But the Romans had a staggering ability to cope with adversity. Coming back from the disasters of Lake Trasimene (217 BC) and Cannae (216 BC) during the Second Punic War (when the Romans were heavily defeated twice by the Carthaginian general Hannibal who was roaming at will in Italy) was a turning point.

The Roman army was based on organisation and flexibility, always adapting to circumstances. Its soldiers were also exceptionally well-equipped, most notably with the *gladius Hispaniensis*, the 'Spanish sword'. It was a vicious weapon that reflected the harsh reality of brutal face-to-face fighting. But in the imperial age the soldiers became all too prone to toppling one emperor after another in search of ever bigger hand-outs and pay rises, destabilising the empire.

Stories of the army endured long after the last soldiers died – chiefly because the Romans left so much information about it. Historians such as Livy, Josephus and Tacitus loved military history and provide us with a huge amount of detail about campaigns and battles. And the soldiers themselves were also more literate than the general population and were more likely to leave records of their lives, be it in tombstones, religious offerings or letters. This has left a vast archive, and there is no parallel for any other ancient or medieval army.



Apion's letter to his father, in which he shares the new Roman name he was given when he joined the fleet

1 What's in a name?

In the second century AD a young Egyptian called Apion fulfilled the exacting criteria for eligibility for the Roman military – he was between the ages of 17 and 46, freeborn, and passed a rigorous medical examination – and signed up to join the fleet. He then embarked on a dangerous journey from his village in Egypt to Italy, coming close to being shipwrecked en route. Happily, Apion safely reached the Roman fleet base at Misenum on the northern side of the bay of Naples, where he joined the company of a ship called the *Athenonica* and promptly set about writing home to his father.

His letter, which has survived, is in Greek, the everyday language in the eastern Roman empire. "I thank the lord Serapis that when I was in danger at sea he immediately saved me," wrote Apion. He was also delighted on arrival to have "received from Caesar three gold coins for travelling expenses". This was a considerable sum of money, equivalent to around half a year's pay for a member of the fleet. Apion had something else to tell his father, Epimachus: "My name is Antonius Maximus" – this was his brand-new Roman name. Although not every auxiliary soldier took a Roman moniker, some did – and it was a common practice in Apion's fleet. His new name was typically Roman, and for Apion a matter of pride.

2 Rivalry in the ranks

During Julius Caesar's Gallic campaign (fought in modern-day France), two centurions (commanders of 80 men) called Titus Pullo and Lucius Vorenus earned undying fame in the heat of a vicious battle. Caesar was so impressed that he even made a special point of telling their story.

The pair were bitter rivals for the best jobs. One day in 54 BC the legion was under attack from the Nervii tribe (a warlike people who lived in the north of Gaul). Pullo goaded Vorenus, accusing him of waiting for a better opportunity to prove his bravery. Pullo then dived into the fight, leaving Vorenus no alternative but to follow him in case he was thought a coward.

Pullo threw his spear and struck one of the Nervii. But other Nervii flung their spears at Pullo, who had no chance of escaping. He had one spear stuck in his shield, another in his belt, and his scabbard had been pushed out of place. Vorenus dashed up to help, diverting the tribesmen's attention on to him because they thought Pullo was dead. Vorenus killed one and chased off the others, and during the melee Pullo had been able to get away and bring up reinforcements. They escaped back behind the Roman defences, lucky to have their lives.

Caesar said: "It was impossible to decide which should be considered the better man in valour."



3 Sleeves' secret meaning

An early third-century AD tombstone from South Shields fort reads: "Victor, a Moorish tribesman, aged 20, freedman of Numerianus... who most devotedly conducted him to the tomb." In the tombstone's engraving, Victor wears a long-sleeved tunic (men who wore this item of clothing were assumed to have a preference for male partners) and robe while he lounges on a couch. Whether he and Numerianus shared a sexual relationship can only be conjecture, but the unusually affectionate nature of the piece suggests that possibility.

Scipio Africanus, the famous general of the Second Punic War over 400 years earlier, disapproved of such relationships. He once described "a young man who with a lover has reclined (at meals) in a long-sleeved tunic on the inside of a couch, and is not only partial to wine, but also to men. Does anyone doubt that he does what sodomites are accustomed to doing?"

Victor's tombstone amounts to a



Victor (above) may have been the lover of a Roman soldier called Numerianus

visual realisation of Scipio's words, but replacing condemnation with veneration. It suggests that, by Victor's time and in this frontier fort, his relationship with Numerianus was most likely conducted openly and in safety.



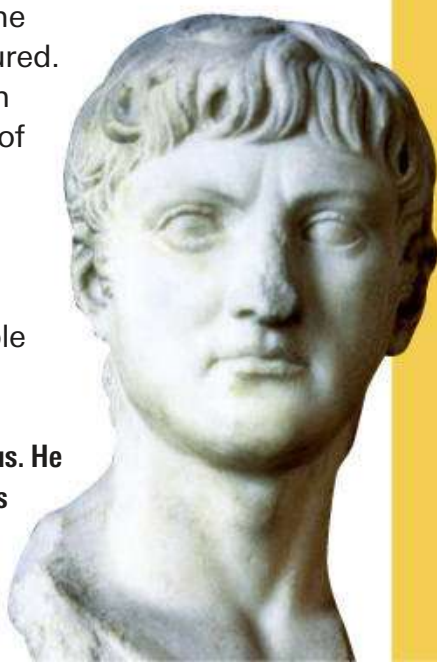
Ray Stevenson and Kevin McKidd portray centurions Titus Pullo (left) and Lucius Vorenus in the 2005 series *Rome*

4 Bullying centurions

Centurions played a key part in the everyday disciplining of soldiers, and it could backfire. During the mutiny among the Pannonian legions in AD 14, one harsh disciplinarian of a centurion called Lucilius was killed. He had earned himself the nickname *Cedo Alteram* ('bring me another!') in reference to his habit of breaking his vine rod symbol of office over the back of one ordinary soldier after another and calling for a fresh stick to be brought. The VIII and XV legions were on the point of coming to blows over another centurion called Sirpicus, as he also bullied common soldiers. Only the intervention of Legio VIII saved him.

In that same year, a mutiny was stirred up among the Rhine legions over the way pay and conditions had been ignored. The men's first target was the centurions "who had fuelled the soldiers' hatred for the longest". The soldiers all bore the scars of beatings they had endured. They struck each centurion with 60 blows to match the number of centurions in a legion, killing some and severely injuring the rest, and threw them into the rampart or into the Rhine. Only the general Germanicus was able to calm the men down.

The general Germanicus. He stopped mutinous soldiers from murdering centurions



ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES



This fourth-century Roman floor mosaic shows a boar hunt, a popular pastime among officers

5 In pursuit of pleasure

Some officers spent their spare time composing poetry or writing, but others had less refined hobbies – and for these men, hunting was often top of the list. In around the third century AD, Gaius Tetius Veturius Micianus, the commanding officer of the Gaulish Ala Sebosiana in northern Britain, triumphantly hunted down a boar that had apparently fought off all other attempts to capture it.

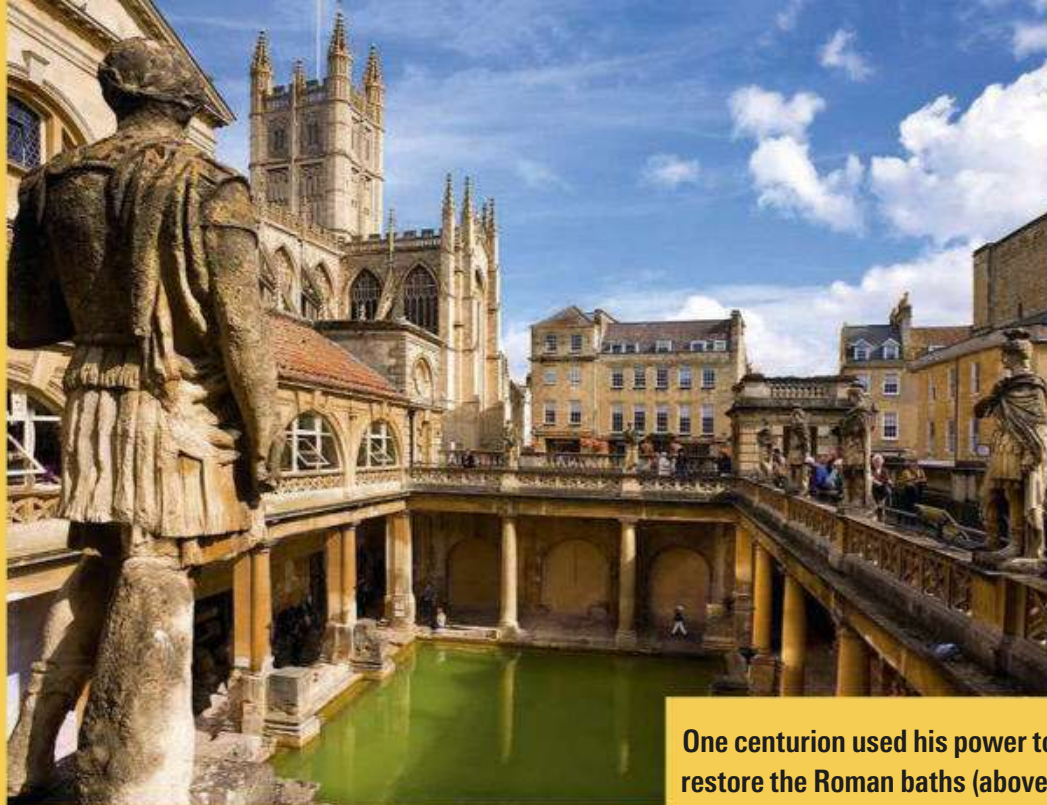
The officer commemorated his kill on an altar that he set up on Bollihope Common. Its text brags: "Gaius Tetius Veturius Micianus, prefect commanding the cavalry wing of Sebosians, willingly set this up to the Divinities of the Emperors and Unconquerable Silvanus [in return] for taking a wild boar of remarkable fineness which many of his predecessors had been unable to turn into booty."

6 A civil war tragedy

In AD 69 Rome descended into a vicious civil war that involved four rival emperors who battled it out in turn: Galba, Otho, Vitellius and the eventual victor, Vespasian. As violence raged across the empire, one particularly tragic event occurred.

Legio XXI Rapax supported Vitellius. One of its soldiers was a Spaniard called Julius Mansuetus who had left a son behind at home. Not long after this, the boy reached adulthood and joined Legio VII Gemina, formed by Galba, one of the four rival emperors, in AD 68. But by the time of the second battle of Bedriacum, VII Gemina was on Vespasian's side.

During the fierce fighting, the young soldier unknowingly fatally wounded his own father. Only when he was searching Mansuetus' barely conscious body did he realise what he had done. Profusely apologising to his father before he died, he then picked up the body and buried it. Other soldiers noticed what was going on, and they all ruminated on the pointless destruction the war had brought. The historian Tacitus, however, told his readers that it made no difference. Nothing stopped the soldiers carrying on "killing and robbing their relatives, kin and brothers". Calling it a crime, "in the same breath they did it themselves".



One centurion used his power to restore the Roman baths (above) which had been vandalised

7 Laying down the law

The job of centurion carried with it great responsibility – not only were they in charge of soldiers, but some were tasked with civilian administration, too. The centurion Gaius Severius Emeritus oversaw the region around the spa at Bath in Britain. He was disgusted to find that one of the sacred places had been wrecked "by insolent hands", as Emeritus called them. Frustrated by gratuitous vandalism and the oafs responsible, he had the place restored, and set up an altar to commemorate the fact.

It seems to have been a good idea to keep these powerful men on side, and many tried to bribe them.

During the reign of Hadrian, Julius Clemens, a centurion of Legio XXII Deiotariana, wrote to Sokration, an Egyptian civilian who had sent Clemens a bribe of olive oil, and implored: "And do you write to me about what you may need, knowing that I gladly do everything for you."

The potential for centurions in charge of civilian administration to abuse their positions is obvious. But they weren't alone. The poet Juvenal, who had himself once commanded an auxiliary unit, was deeply critical of how Roman soldiers threw their weight about, beat up members of the public and flouted justice.



The tombstone of Sextus Valerius Genialis. As a soldier, he met people from across the Roman empire

8 Diverse homelands

Although most legionaries came from Italy, Gaul and Spain, the auxiliary forces were raised from all over the Roman empire. Let's take, for instance, an auxiliary soldier called Sextus Valerius Genialis. He was one of the Frisiavone people and hailed from Gallia Belgica (a region covering modern-day north-eastern France, Belgium and Luxembourg), but he served with a Thracian cavalry unit in Britain and had a completely Roman name.

The ethnic titles the auxiliary units sported – such as Ala I Britannica – are often taken surprisingly literally by military historians and archaeologists, who assume the men in these units must have been

of the same ethnicity. However, the records of individual soldiers show that unless very specialised fighting skills were involved (like those of the Syrian archers), the reality was often different.

From AD 240–50 the cavalry wing Ala I Britannica had around six Thracian men recruited to its ranks, and these men served with others of Pannonian origin (men from central Europe) – despite the fact that the cavalry wing was supposedly made up of Britons. Similar stories can be found in the fleet, too. A Briton named Veluotigernus joined the Classis Germanica fleet and was honourably discharged on 19 November AD 150 along with veterans from the auxiliary cavalry and infantry units in Germania Inferior.



A mother nurses her child on this sarcophagus. Soldiers weren't supposed to marry, but many did

9 Forbidden family

Although Roman soldiers were not supposed to marry (the law that prohibited them from taking a wife was only relaxed at the end of the second century AD) the evidence from tombstones and documents is that plenty did. In the late first century – around 100 years before the law was eased – the poet Martial knew a centurion called Aulus Pudens who was married to a woman called Claudia Peregrina ('Claudia the Provincial'). Martial tells us Claudia was very fertile and that she had "sprung from the woad-stained Britons".

In Egypt, meanwhile, a soldier called Julius Terentianus placed his children and his other private affairs in the hands of his sister, Apollonous, in Karanis. As he refers to the care of his children in letters to her,

it is quite possible that this was a case of brother-sister marriage, which was well-known in Egypt. In AD 99 Apollonous wrote to him to say: "Do not worry about the children. They are in good health and are kept busy by a teacher."

More often we know about soldiers' children only because they died tragically young. For instance, Simplicia Florentina, a child "of the most innocent spirit", had lived for a scant 10 months before she passed away. Her father, Felicius Simplex, a centurion of Legio VI Victrix, buried her at York. Likewise, Septimius Licinius, who served with Legio II Parthica at Castra Albana in Italy, buried his "dear son Septimius Licinianus" when the boy was only aged three years, four months and 24 days.



Tombstones – like this one, belonging to Titus Flaminus of the XIII Legion – tell us much about soldiers' lives

10 Leaving their mark

Just before the battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC Julius Caesar asked Crassinius, one of his centurions, how he thought the battle would go. Crassinius replied: "We shall conquer, O Caesar, and you will thank me, living or dead." Crassinius was true to his word and covered himself in glory that day, but he lost his life. Caesar gave the centurion's body full military honours and had a tomb built specially for Crassinius alone, close to the mass burial mound for the rest.

Unlike Crassinius, the vast majority of Roman soldiers have no known resting place. However, the tombstones that have survived tell us a great deal about fighters' individual lives and their mindsets. This is quite unlike other ancient and medieval conflicts, such as the Wars of the Roses, for which there is no equivalent record.

For instance, from examining the tombstone of Titus Flaminus, who served with Legio XIII in the earliest days of the Roman conquest of Britain and died at the legion's base at Wroxeter aged 45 after 22 years' service, we can see that he seems to have had no regrets. His tombstone has a poignant message for us: "I served as a soldier, and now here I am. Read this, and be happy – more or less – in your lifetime. [May] the gods keep you from the wine-grape, and water, when you enter Tartarus [the mythical pit beneath the Earth]. Live honourably while your star gives you life." **H**

Guy de la Bédoyère is a historian and broadcaster. His new book, *Gladius: Living, Fighting and Dying in the Roman Army*, was published by Little, Brown Book Group last month

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MAXIMILIANVS I IMP
ARCHIDVX AVSTRIÆ
DVX BVRGVNDIÆ

PHILIPPVS HISP. REX. I.
ARCHIDVX AVSTRIÆ.

The dynasty th

FERDINANDVS. I. IMP.

CAROLVS. V. IMP.



Not even madness, alcoholism and bloody wars of religion could deny the Habsburgs their status as one of the great powerhouses of Europe. **Martyn Rady** shares the survival secrets of a family that, for 900 years, displayed a remarkable capacity for self-preservation

at wouldn't die

The family of Maximilian I (top left), shown in a c1515–20 portrait. The marriage of Maximilian's son Philip (top, centre) to Juana of Castile was a brilliant diplomatic move, securing the Habsburgs a global empire



A pendant owned by Archduchess Anna of Austria in the 16th century. The double-headed eagle was an emblem of Habsburg power

The Habsburgs

If the great dynasties of central Europe have one thing in common, it is that they don't know when they're beaten. They are history's great survivors. The German Wittelsbachs ruled Bavaria and the Palatinate from the 12th to the 20th centuries – a 700-year lifecycle that encompassed everything from the High Middle Ages to the First World War.

The Guelphs of Hanover and Brunswick, whose line can be traced with some certainty back to the ninth century, were just as resilient, acquiring the British throne (through King George I) in the 18th century, and subsequently marrying into the Greek, Danish and Spanish royal families.

Yet of all Europe's dynasties, surely none displayed a greater capacity for self-preservation than the Habsburgs. From inbreeding and infighting to ruinous religious schisms, all manner of calamities threatened to drive this remarkable family into extinction. Yet nothing could stop it dominating swathes of central Europe and beyond from the Middle Ages into the modern era.

We can confidently trace the Habsburgs' origins to 10th-century Switzerland, where among their earliest possessions was the Castle Habsburg that gave the family its name. Then a part of the Holy Roman Empire, the Aargau region was lush, watered by the Alpine rivers, and it straddled the commercial routes that later joined northern Italy to the great fairs of Champagne and Flanders. Its wealth was the starting-point for the Habsburgs' rise to power.

Chance played a part in their ascent, too, since the Habsburgs outlived most of their neighbours and, on their expiry, went off with their lands. In the general chaos that attended the collapse of the Hohenstaufen

line of emperors in the mid-13th century, Count Rudolf of Habsburg was elected king of Germany. In his own description, an "insatiable man of war", Rudolf used the opportunity to capture Austria and what is now Slovenia. His successors pushed towards the Adriatic and took the Tyrol in the 14th century. They became Holy Roman Emperors in the mid-15th century, and shortly afterwards took possession of the Low Countries.

Pulled east and west

That wasn't the end of the Habsburgs' expansion. In the 16th century, they exploded outwards, obtaining Spain by way of a lucky marriage between Philip the Handsome, son of the future Habsburg emperor Maximilian (ruled 1508–19), and the Spanish princess Juana of Castile in 1496. Along with it came an overseas empire that would eventually include much of the New World, the Philippines, northern Taiwan, Guam and outposts on the Chinese, west African and Indian coasts. The Habsburgs were the first European rulers to found an empire upon which the sun never set or, as was said at the time, where the mass was in continuous celebration. Philip and Juana's son, Charles V, who became Holy Roman Emperor in 1519, was the first "world monarch", whose dominions extended across four continents.

But with great power came new threats. Keeping Hungary and Bohemia out of the double clutches of the Turks and Protestants preoccupied the Habsburgs for centuries. The acquisition of their large central European territory pulled the Habsburgs in two directions, westwards and eastwards. Following the abdication of Emperor Charles V in 1555–56, one branch, headed by Charles's son Philip II, ruled Spain and the Low Countries, while a second, led by Charles's brother



Riding high

Rudolf of Habsburg routs Ottokar of Bohemia in 1278, as depicted in a 19th-century painting. Victory at the battle on the Marchfeld confirmed the Habsburgs' status as a leading power in central Europe

The Habsburgs were the first European rulers to found an empire upon which the sun never set

TIMELINE The Habsburgs' extending family

Early 11th century

Radbot, Count of Klettgau builds **Castle Habsburg** – after which the dynasty takes its name – now in the Swiss Aargau.

1278

The Habsburgs gain the **rule of the duchies of Austria and Styria**, which they hold for more than 600 years.

1452

Habsburg king Frederick III is crowned Holy Roman Emperor. After 1477, the Habsburgs accumulate yet more power, adding the Low Countries to their territory.

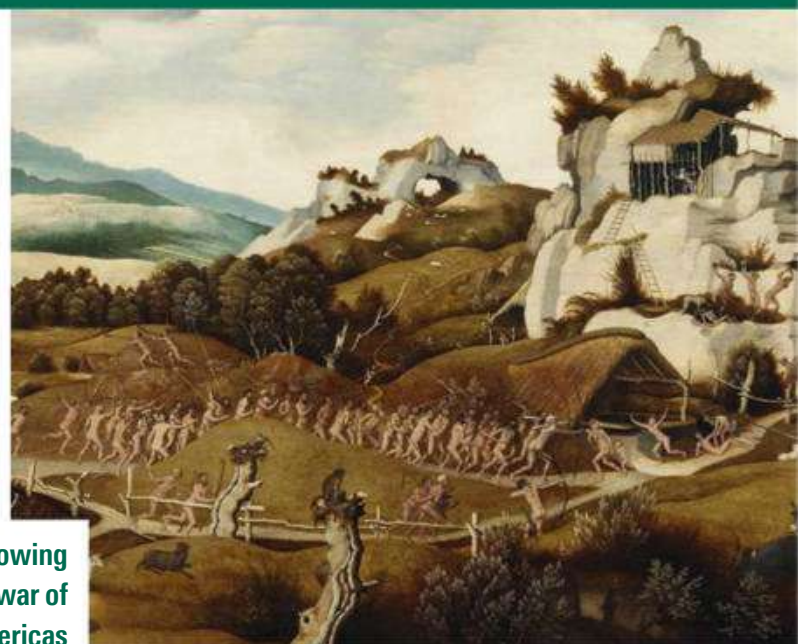
1516

Charles V becomes the **first Habsburg king of Spain**. Due to the global spread of the territories under his dominion, he is known as the first "world monarch". Three years later he becomes Holy Roman Emperor.



Castle Habsburg, a key locale in the rise of one of Europe's great dynasties

A c1535 painting showing Spanish troops' war of conquest in the Americas





Power couple Philip the Handsome and Juana of Castile shown in a relief in the Royal Chapel of Granada. Their 1496 marriage led to the Habsburgs acquiring the kingdom of Spain and, eventually, much of the New World

Archduke Ferdinand, presided over the Holy Roman Empire (including Austria and Bohemia) and Hungary.

Wine and women

To survive and prosper, all dynasties need a little good fortune, and the Habsburgs certainly had that – especially in the realm of biology. On average, princely and noble dynasties in premodern Europe had a 15 per cent failure rate every 25 years. In other words, about a half perished through a lack of male heirs every century.

With so much at stake, many Habsburgs took care to have plenty of children. The first Habsburg rulers of Austria, in the 13th and 14th centuries, generally aimed for a dozen, while Empress Maria Theresa (ruled 1740–80) had no fewer than 16 in just two decades.

Habsburg men were expected to be busy in the bedroom as it was thought that wombs needed frequent lubrication to stop them from shrivelling. Since fecundity and the production of sons were believed to be related to personal piety, most Habsburg rulers and their wives were also conspicuous in their dedication to the Catholic faith.

Other methods were used to aid fertility. To make sure that his fiancée, Elisabeth Christine of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, was up to the task, Emperor Charles VI (ruled 1711–40) obliged her before marriage to go through a humiliating gynaecological examination under the oversight of a Jesuit priest. Thereafter, he plied her with copious draughts of red wine in the belief that they were an aid to conception. The quack remedy backfired, transforming the once dazzling ‘Lily White’

(‘Weisse Liesl’) into an obese alcoholic.

Homosexuality and cross-dressing was no bar to being put on the marriage market – as Archduke Ludwig Viktor, brother of Emperor Franz Joseph (ruled 1848–1916), discovered in the 1860s. However, his reputation preceded him, and he remained a bachelor all his life.

Yet despite their best efforts to secure the succession, the Habsburgs still took enormous risks. Once they’d produced a male heir, rulers often packed younger sons into the church, having them serve as bishops and thus dedicating themselves to celibacy. Should the eldest son die, then a male sibling might be whisked from the church and appointed heir apparent – it was via this ecclesiastical detour that Emperor Leopold I (ruled 1658–1705) came to the throne. The

1526

Archduke Ferdinand acquires the **kingdoms of Bohemia and Hungary**, territories the Habsburgs won’t relinquish until the 20th century.

1555–56

The dynasty splits in two: Spain and the Low Countries in the west; and the Holy Roman Empire, Austria, Bohemia and Hungary in the east.

1700

The death of the Habsburg king of Spain Charles II sparks a succession crisis. Spain now falls to the French Bourbons.

1720

Charles VI’s Pragmatic Sanction paves the way for his daughter Maria Theresa to assume his throne.

1740

On Charles VI’s death, **the Habsburg male line ends** but, thanks to Maria Theresa, the Habsburg name endures in a new dynasty: the Habsburg-Lorraines.

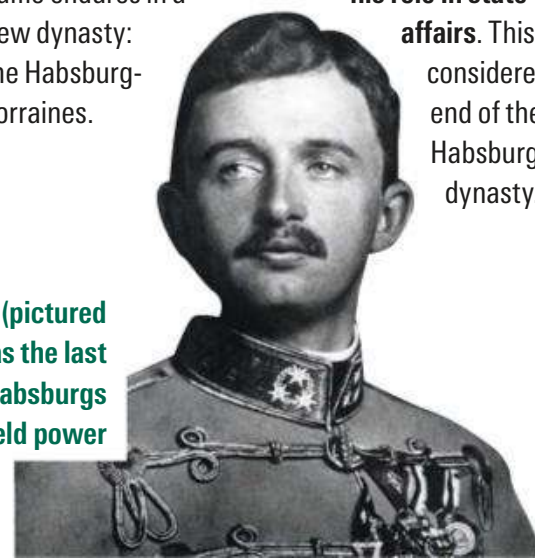
11 November 1918

At the end of the First World War, the last Habsburg ruler, Charles I of Austria, **renounces his role in state affairs**. This is considered the end of the Habsburg dynasty.

Habsburg troops are defeated at the battle of Denain, 1712. Charles II’s death plunged Europe into conflict



Charles I (pictured 1916) was the last of the Habsburgs to wield power



The Habsburgs



Plan B Like many Habsburg second sons, a future of celibacy in the clergy beckoned for Leopold I. But after his older brother died, he sired 16 children



Stand-out feature A portrait of Charles II displaying the trademark Habsburg jutting lower jaw, probably the result of generations of intermarrying



Lifelong bachelor Archduke Ludwig Viktor's homosexuality didn't stop his family trying – and failing – to marry him off in the mid-19th century

problem was that, by putting younger sons into the church, collateral lines that might have filled eventual gaps in the main line of descent were not created.

Habsburg marriage law was only properly regulated in 1839. Until then, it rested on the principle that members of the family should only take spouses that were 'worthy', which in practice meant a royal or princely descent. The challenge was finding wives that fitted the formula. With the spread of Protestantism in Europe, the number of suitable Catholic brides contracted. Bavarians were one possibility, except that the Catholic Wittelsbach dukes had the unfortunate habit of generating more boys than girls. The tradition thus arose of the two branches of the Habsburgs – the Spanish and central European – intermarrying and exchanging partners every generation.

The arrangement made good political sense, guaranteeing that the two lines would support each other militarily, which paid dividends in the Thirty Years' War (the bloody religious conflict fought across central Europe from 1618–48). Biologically, however, it was a disaster. As first and second-cousin and uncle-niece marriages became the norm, madness and deformity followed. Even the tame artists at Habsburg courts could not hide the jutting lower jaws of Habsburg sovereigns, a condition that made it impossible for them to eat comfortably. As one British envoy remarked of the Spanish Habsburg king Charles II (ruled 1665–1700):

"He has a ravenous stomach, and swallows all he eats whole, for his nether jaw stands so much out, that his two rows of teeth cannot meet." By gorging his food unchewed, the ambassador explained, the king suffered from abdominal cramps and excessive vomiting.

All of these close intermarriages counted as incestuous and so needed papal approval, but this did not bless the unions with an abundance of heirs. In fact, the figures for infant mortality are shocking. Between 1527 and 1661, the Habsburg kings of Spain sired 34 legitimate children. Of these, 10 died before their first year and 17 before the age of 10, yielding a death rate significantly higher than the average for Spain at that time. The central European branch of the Habsburgs generally fared better. Even so, nine of Leopold I's 16 children (by three wives) did

As cousins married cousins and uncles married nieces, madness and deformity followed

not survive infancy. Most of these premature deaths were caused by inbreeding.

The majority of Habsburgs were capable of producing children, but even this facility was eventually lost. A post-mortem of Charles II of Spain performed in 1700 disclosed "a very small heart, lungs corroded, intestines putrefactive and gangrenous, three large stones in the kidney, a single testicle, black as coal, and his head full of water". A modern review of the medical evidence concludes that "Charles suffered from posterior hypospadias, monorchism and an atrophic testicle. He probably had an intersexual state with ambiguous genitalia, and a congenital monokidney with stones and infections" – in other words, he had a single kidney and single testicle, and his urethra exited on the underside of an undeveloped penis.

It seems altogether improbable that the poor king could perform the sexual act. Even after 10 years of marriage, Charles's first wife, with whom he shared a pathetic intimacy, was unable to say whether or not she was a virgin. Habitually unwashed and unkempt, the poor king drifted into insanity, gruesomely inspecting the corpses of his ancestors in the vaults of Spain's Escorial Palace.

Looming extinction

The death of the heirless Charles II was followed by a war of succession across Europe. Although the central European branch of the Habsburgs hoped to capture the dead king's inheritance, its rulers failed to



Family politics

Maria Theresa, her husband Francis I and their family, in a c1754–55 painting. As a woman, Maria Theresa was unable to assume the title of Holy Roman Emperor but it was she who pulled the levers of power, ensuring the Habsburg dynasty survived its brush with extinction

The Habsburgs

keep hold of Spain, which passed to the French Bourbons. Almost immediately, the same fate of extinction as had befallen the Spanish Habsburg line threatened the central European.

The Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI (reigned 1711–40) was the last surviving Habsburg male. His elder brother had died prematurely, and an uncle, who might have provided a substitute line, had been a bishop and so was childless. Despite the precautions Charles had taken at the time of his marriage, it was eight years before he and Lily White produced a son, and he died after just seven months. Thereafter, she only bore girls, starting with Maria Theresa in 1717.

The Habsburg possessions in central Europe had no uniform scheme of succession. Some permitted female inheritance, but others not. So Charles hatched a plan to ensure the survival of the dynasty: he changed the law of succession to allow universal female succession, first appointing his nieces as his successors and then, following Maria Theresa's birth, his daughter as his main heir. The new scheme – known as the Pragmatic Sanction – was first announced in 1713 and over the next 10 years Charles persuaded the parliaments or diets of his central European dominions to accept it. In a further bid to future-proof his daughter's rights, Charles also secured the endorsement of the major European powers.

All this mattered not a jot. When Charles died in 1740, Frederick the Great of Prussia invaded Silesia (now mostly in Poland), disputing Maria Theresa's right to it (as part of the War of the Austrian Succession), while the electors of Bavaria and Saxony, supported by Louis XV of France, marched into Bohemia. Charles of Bavaria was crowned king of Bohemia in 1741 and elected Holy Roman Emperor the next year.

Although Maria Theresa had to relinquish all but a strip of Silesia, she saw off her adversaries, depriving Charles of Bavaria first of Bohemia, then of the Bohemian crown, and twice of his capital Munich. Even her adversary Frederick the Great celebrated her as “the only man among my opponents”, while in England pub signs were repainted in her honour. As one English wag later recalled of Maria Theresa, “the queen of Hungary's head was to be seen in almost every street, and we fought and drank under her banner at our own expense during the whole war”.

Prophets and popes

Charles of Bavaria died in 1745. The office of Holy Roman Emperor was technically elective but had until 1740 been effectively hereditary in the Habsburg family. As a woman, Maria Theresa was ineligible to be



Last man standing

Charles VI, depicted in a painting from 1728, changed the law of succession, paving the way for his daughter, Maria Theresa, to succeed him to the throne

sovereign of the Holy Roman Empire, for the Pragmatic Sanction did not apply to the empire but only to the Habsburg family dominions. In her place, the nine electoral princes chose as Charles's successor Maria Theresa's husband, Francis Stephen of Lorraine. Maria Theresa thus became empress, but only through her husband.

The Habsburgs had over centuries built a grand mythology about themselves, heaping on legends and stories that spoke to the family's destiny as great rulers. Double-headed eagles, acrostics and ancient prophecies added lustre to the image of power foretold, along with an alleged biological connection to Old Testament prophets, Greek and Egyptian deities, 100 popes and almost 200 saints and martyrs.

But it was in the 1740s that the Habsburgs

pulled off one of their greatest coups. The Habsburg male line had ended. What had taken its place was the House of Lorraine. Future heirs should have been known as Lorrainers and not as Habsburgs, in the same way as Queen Victoria of Great Britain produced (by virtue of her marriage to Prince Albert) Saxe-Coburg and Gotha heirs, and not Hanoverians.

But Maria Theresa had her way, prevailing over her husband, who customarily deferred to her. Instead of her descendants belonging to the House of Lorraine, they would, at Maria Theresa's insistence, be considered members of the House of Austria-Lorraine or (as it was later known) Habsburg-Lorraine.

The Habsburg line had perished with the death of Charles VI but, with a sleight of title, Maria Theresa gave it a second life that would carry the Habsburgs into the 20th century. Ironically, it was a family tragedy that brought about the Habsburgs' downfall – the assassination in 1914 of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, nephew and heir of the Emperor Franz Joseph. It plunged the Habsburgs into a war they could not win. Until then, the Habsburgs were central Europe's great survivors – and that included their name. **H**

Frederick the Great declared that Maria Theresa was “the only man among my opponents”

Martyn Rady is Masaryk professor of central European history at University College London. He is the author of *The Habsburgs: The Rise and Fall of a World Power* (Allen Lane, 2020)



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Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

Why did people start wearing wigs?

Wigs have long been worn to hide hair loss, act out learned professions, or for fashion. The donning of wigs by barristers, artists such as Andy Warhol, and cancer patients who have lost their hair during chemotherapy each have their historical precedents.

There was, however, one period when wigs were especially popular – only to become widely mocked. In the late 17th and 18th centuries, wigs passed from the aristocracy into the populace. They were worn to mimic the great and the good, and to hide bad health (even if it was said that heavy false hair caused headaches).

Wigs were expensive, but they could be altered and upgraded according to whim. While always playful, wig-wearing and making became art – one Parisian peruke-maker even ventured into writing tragedies, before Voltaire rebuffed his artistic pretension.

Wigs became so widespread – and tall – that they reached a tipping point. Quite literally. No longer coveted accessories worn exclusively by the elites, the hairpieces became everyday items that were ridiculed in plays, cartoons and books. In a German play from around 1800, a cat has kittens in a judge's wig; in a typical British caricature a pug pees in a periwig. And in a mock memoir of an old wig, the object that once marked social status and taste had fallen into a shoe-polisher's bag.

Wigs now signified the old order. A new age of natural hair and liberty was supposedly unleashed. In 1801, the German author Friedrich Nicolai published a treatise on wig-wearing among ancients versus the moderns. And so w(h)ig history was written...

Seán Williams, senior lecturer in German and European cultural history at the University of Sheffield

ILLUSTRATION BY GLEN MCBETH

Is it true that Santa used to wear a green coat?

The modern-day Father Christmas in the red, fur-trimmed coat and hat is often attributed to the iconic 'Santa' popularised in the 1930s by the Coca-Cola Christmas adverts. However, the origins of the colour of his coat are speculative.

Prior to the Christian celebration of Christmas, festivities focused on the change of season following the winter solstice: the shortest day of the year. In the fifth and sixth centuries, the Holly King (also known as King Frost or King Winter) symbolised hope and the promise of spring and new life. He wore a green cloak and was often draped in ivy, or wore wreaths of holly or mistletoe. His role was often enacted by a person in the community, and he was invited into people's homes as they wished for good luck in the coming spring.

It is possible that the Holly King – as he was welcomed into people's homes in celebration – evolved into the red coat-clad Father Christmas that we have welcomed down our chimneys for generations. It is unlikely, however, that the Coke advert is solely responsible for his costume change.

Helen Carr, medieval historian and presenter of the *Hidden Histories* podcast



A man draped in greenery celebrates Twelfth Night. The pagan Holly King (also garbed in green) may have evolved into Father Christmas



An equal pay for women demonstration in Trafalgar Square, 1969. Ian Mortimer argues that wealth has been most equally shared between Britain's population since 1970

When has Britain's wealth been shared most equally between its population?

►►► In one respect, this is an easy question to answer, for the simple fact that women suffered huge wealth disadvantages until modern times. Married women's property was legally their husbands' until the early 1880s, and women were paid significantly less than men for the same work before the arrival of the 1970 Equal Pay Act. This means the half-century since 1970 has to be the answer.

Looked at as family wealth, however, it is difficult to compare recent centuries with the Middle Ages. In the distant past, income was not just a matter of money but also included rights and services. For example, a lord might charge a tenant 1d per acre for rent of land but require him also to work on his (the lord's) fields for nothing for three days a week. Thus, although the average nobleman in the 14th century received about £250 per year while a labourer earned about £2 10s, the difference in their wealth was much more than 100 times due to the extra rights that the lord had over his tenant.

But it is possible to compare income in more recent centuries. According to Gregory King, writing in 1688, 16,560 noble and gentry families (1.2 per cent of the population) had a total income of £6.12 million (an average of £368 10s per family), while 849,000 working-class families (62 per cent of the population) had £9.55 million (£11 5s per family). This suggests that upper-class families were, on average, over 33 times as well off as working-class ones. In 1812 Patrick

Colquhoun calculated that 47,377 noble and gentry families (1.35 per cent of the population) received £58,182,110 (average: £1,228) and 1,329,251 seamen, common soldiers, labourers and paupers (40 per cent of the population) earned £62,462,475 (£47 per family), with the paupers receiving an extra £6 million in handouts. Laying aside the poor relief, the difference in income in 1812 was almost as significant: 26 times. This is far more unequal than today. The IFS report *Living Standards, Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2019* states that the richest 1 per cent of families had an average household income of £2,500 per week in 2017–18 – less than 7 times that of the poorest 50 per cent of the population. It also shows that income inequality has been rising gradually since 1980.

On the matter of asset wealth, the economist Thomas Piketty states that in 1810, the richest 10 per cent of the population owned 80 per cent of the country's wealth. That figure increased to 90 per cent by 1910 and declined thereafter, to 62 per cent in 1980. It has since risen back up to 70 per cent. Therefore, whether you treat this as a question of sexual equality, income or assets, there are good reasons to look at the period since 1970 as the most equal we have known in this country – but things are beginning to return to older, less equal ways.

.....
Ian Mortimer, author of *The Time Traveller's Guide to Regency Britain* (Bodley Head, 2020)

DID YOU KNOW...?

Potty-mouthed parrot

A raucous parrot interrupted the funeral of a former American president. Andrew Jackson died on 8 June 1845 at his home in Tennessee. Thousands of people attended his funeral two days later, where the show was stolen by Jackson's African grey parrot, unoriginally named Poll. Poll decided that the best way to mourn her late owner was through a series of squawks, squeaks and swear words. Eventually, she had to be removed so that the funeral could proceed more quietly.



Dancing to the top

A Tudor politician was known as 'the dancing chancellor' because he came to Elizabeth I's attention through his talents on the dance floor. As a young man, Sir Christopher Hatton had done little but engage in the half-hearted study of the law, but he caught the queen's eye during a court masque. He became one of her favourites and was eventually made lord chancellor in 1587. Hatton was first set on the path to high office, as one contemporary wrote, "by the galliard".

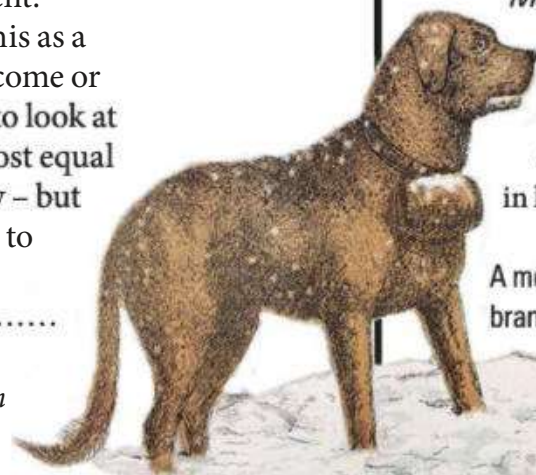
Hair of the dog

Contrary to popular belief, St Bernards have never carried small casks of brandy on their collars with which to revive people lost in the Alps. Although the dogs are regularly depicted in cartoons, films and books bringing alcoholic sustenance to weary travellers, the monks at the St Bernard Hospice in the Great St Bernard Pass deny this has ever been the case. The legend probably derives from Edwin Landseer's 1820 painting, *Alpine Mastiffs Reanimating a Distressed Traveller*.

Mastiffs Reanimating a Distressed Traveller. H

.....
Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history

A mountain dog carries a cask of brandy on its collar. Is this image based on fact or fiction?



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THE HISTORIA

A world in turmoil

The past 12 months have seen dramatic events around the globe, including (left to right): protests against monuments to divisive colonial figures, such as this statue of Belgian soldier Émile Storms in Brussels; Black Lives Matter demonstrations (shown here in New York); the ongoing coronavirus pandemic; and the impact of climate change, including forest fires in Australia



ANS' VERDICT

From debates about colonialism to the lessons of previous pandemics, history has repeatedly made the headlines this year. We assembled a panel of experts to discuss the ways history has shaped 2020 – and how the events of this momentous year should change our understanding of the past

INTERVIEW BY **MATT ELTON**

THE PANEL

Kerri Greenidge



An assistant professor in the department of studies in race, colonialism, and diaspora at Tufts University, Massachusetts,

Greenidge's most recent book is *Black Radical: The Life and Times of William Monroe Trotter* (Liveright Norton, 2019), which was shortlisted for this year's Cundill History Prize.

Tom Holland



Holland is a historian, broadcaster and the author of books including *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind*

(Little, Brown, 2019). He has just finished a translation for Penguin Classics of Suetonius's *Lives of the Caesars*.

Suzannah Lipscomb



Professor of history at the University of Roehampton, Lipscomb is an author and broadcaster. Her books include *The Voices of Nîmes: Women, Sex, and Marriage in Reformation Languedoc* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

Michael Wood



Wood is a historian, film-maker and broadcaster, and professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He is the monthly

columnist for *BBC History Magazine*, and his most recent book is *The Story of China: A Portrait of a Civilisation and its People* (Simon & Schuster, 2020).

Matt Elton: The past year has been extraordinary. Which news stories have stood out for you as historians?

Michael Wood: There's an apocryphal Chinese saying – "may you live in interesting times" – and it's been a fascinating year if you're interested in history. Coronavirus has, of course, been huge news. And the Black Lives Matter movement is vitally important, not only in its own right but as part of a wider revolt against the political and intellectual establishment encoded in the 19th century and the view of history that underwrote it.

Of course, the biggest history story is climate change, which is rapidly becoming a catastrophe. It affects everything, and no event is more serious, but it's been masked this year by other, utterly remarkable stories.

Tom Holland: Environmental degradation clearly remains a huge story – and not just climate change, either, but also the ongoing process of mass extinction, and the encroachment of humans on to reaches of the world previously immune to such encroachment. Of course, that's partly what led to the pandemic, and the onset of zoonotic viruses and pandemics is part of a trend that we can expect to recur in the future.

Another story is the ongoing rise of China and, more generally, the rise of a multi-polar world. The pandemic has brought home to us the way in which, as the west's economic, military and political power retreats, so too does its cultural power. This year has demonstrated to us that the assumption the west has been able to enjoy for at least 200 years – that what it thinks and argues, and its values, problems and issues, will have an impact on the rest of the world – is no longer the case. Indeed, I have a rather different perspective on Black Lives Matter which is how specific to the west, and Anglo-America, it is. It makes no sense at all to other parts of the world.

Kerri Greenidge: On the contrary, I think that the events of 2020 have demonstrated the need, at this moment in world history, to recognise that movements around the world, such as Black Lives Matter's stand against racial capitalism, are not localised. They are global. Even though they are led by particular groups of people – specifically African-descended and African-American people in the Movement for Black Lives in the United States, for instance – they have global repercussions.

There's a reason why people in parts of Asia, Africa, eastern Europe and the Caribbean were waving Black Lives Matter banners at the start of this summer. We are in a moment in which everything is global, and in which the world as a whole is experiencing crises.

I think that if the past year has taught us anything, it's that we can't see the planet in terms of local issues or of 'west vs east'. If one country doesn't participate, it's going to have an effect on the entire world.

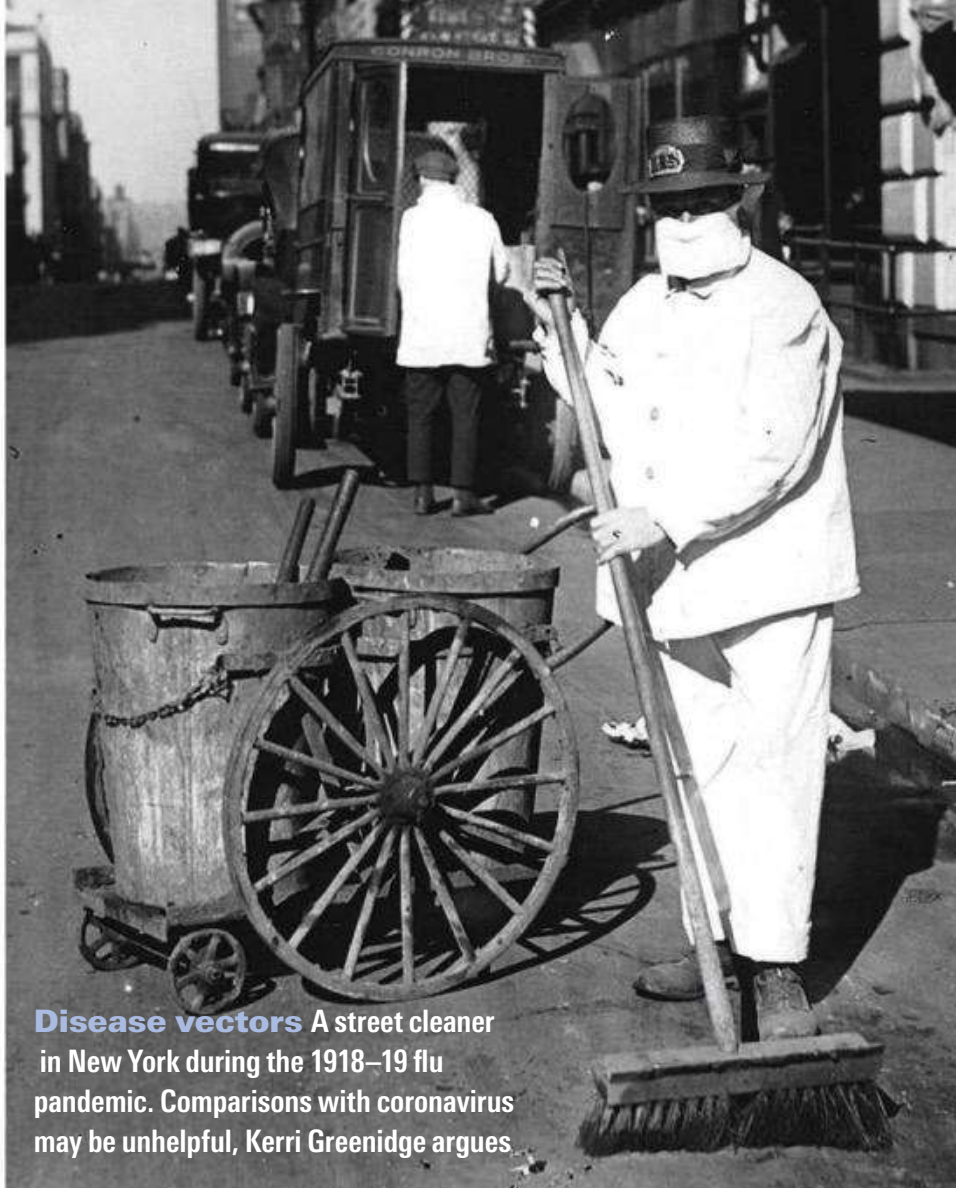
So I hope that what emerges as we try to tackle these issues is the notion that every action taken locally has a global economic, political and cultural impact. We can no longer take the provincial view that, for instance, the recent protests against police brutality in Nigeria somehow have no link to what's happening across the rest of the world.

Suzannah Lipscomb: In many ways, 2020 will unfortunately come to be seen as a year in which many things fell apart. One hopes that they can be picked up and made better, but it's not yet entirely clear how that's going to happen. One of the effects of the pandemic is impoverishment across the world. I don't think we've seen the full consequences of that yet. It isn't just about how many people die, but how many are going to have their lives devastated; we've been very short-termist so far.

It's going to have a huge effect on the arts, heritage, music and theatre, and those sectors aren't easily going to recover. They matter a great deal to our sense of self and our collective, shared imaginations. The effect of the pandemic on heritage and the Black Lives Matter movement are linked by the question of how we come to terms with difficult aspects of our past. Are we reaching a point of reckoning with subjects such as colonialism and slavery, and their legacy? There's been much discussion this year about whether you can 'erase' history – and whether pulling down a statue, for example, *is* erasing it.

On the one hand, you have those who argue that we should not be held hostage by national myths. Others, including the British prime minister, Boris Johnson, have said "it's time we stopped our cringing embarrassment about our history". These issues meet in the impact they have on heritage sites, and on institutions such as the National Portrait Gallery and the British Museum.

At the same time as many institutions have had to cut jobs and are struggling to survive, they are getting letters from the secretary of state for culture telling them what they can and can't do. I think it's extraordinary that they've been told, "we expect your approach to the issues of contested heritage to be consistent with the government's position". It seems an odd area for the government to exert control, when control arguably hasn't been well exerted in dealing with the pandemic. We live in a strange time, in terms of ambiguities and contradictions about the ways in which power and control are handled.



Disease vectors A street cleaner in New York during the 1918–19 flu pandemic. Comparisons with coronavirus may be unhelpful, Kerri Greenidge argues



Warning signs

Hong Kong residents during the 2003 Sars outbreak. The west should have been more alert to its lessons, says Tom Holland

ME: As coronavirus first spread, lots of comparisons were made to the Spanish flu outbreak of 1918–19. How useful is it to draw such explicit historical parallels?

KG: I think that, when people hear commentators drawing parallels between the present and the past, they often assume it must mean that the two are exactly the same – or that what’s happened in the past can tell us what’s going to happen in the future. I would argue that studying history requires more than simply looking at its role in the present: it can tell us what the currents are, how systems work, and about the myriad ways in which human beings in all their fallibilities and complexities react to certain situations.

I don’t want to blame the media for everything, but it would be great to get away from simplistically saying: “Oh my gosh, we had a pandemic back in 1918! Isn’t it the same as today?” Instead, we should explore the historical decisions, actions, thoughts and ideologies that have led us to a moment such as this. That’s where history can tell us, for instance, a lot about how people react to pandemics, or the way in which they have the potential to give rise to autocratic regimes. All of the work that’s been done on past pandemics can inform us about this moment, its dangers, and its radical possibilities.

MW: I agree. There’s a great line attributed to Mark Twain – “history doesn’t repeat itself, but it rhymes” – and there have been disturbing rhymes going on this year, in which the pandemic plays a part. We’re in an unstable political world, with rogue states and states jostling for power, and if I were looking for



// When people hear commentators drawing parallels between the present and the past, they assume the two are exactly the same //

KERRI GREENIDGE

rhymes, I’d look to the build-up to the First World War in 1914; the dangers evident in the 1920s after the Spanish flu pandemic; and the rise of fascism in the 1920 and 30s. Each era saw disastrous turns of events caused both by accidents and unwise leadership, and those are the areas we need to look at today.

Consider the muscular nationalism being employed in China, for instance. As someone I spoke to in Beijing put it: “The Chinese leadership think the US is losing.” It’s arguable that the possibility that they might ‘win’ has prompted Chinese authorities to launch a programme of economic growth and military expansion that might otherwise have taken a decade. That would explain their aggressive stance on the issue of the disputed ownership of the islands in the South China Sea, but also their actions in Hong Kong and Tibet – and even the clash with India on the Himalayan border [Chinese and Indian soldiers were killed in a skirmish in the Ladakh region in June]. They’re testing the water. These are dangerous times.

TH: Understandably, because it’s our history, those of us in the west looking for parallels to the current pandemic look back to pandemics that hit the west in the past. The Spanish flu is the obvious one, but I’ve read lots of articles about the Black Death – and plead guilty to having written a piece comparing it to the [fifth-century BC] plague of Athens.

None are really of immediate relevance. What we *should* have been alert to was the experience of nations around China during the 2002–03 Sars outbreak. One of the reasons Taiwan, South Korea and Japan have

Historians on 2020

dealt with coronavirus so much more successfully than the west, relatively speaking, is that they absorbed those lessons. They were alert to the fact that this kind of pandemic was very liable to come out of China, that it was highly probable the Chinese authorities would try to cover it up, and that therefore there was a heightened risk it would spread.

Of course, it's incredibly easy to say this with the benefit of hindsight. Yet we remain solipsistic: unaware of just how much we have to learn from other areas of the world, and the degree to which our historical experiences no longer provide the default paradigms by which global affairs must be understood.

SL: As a historian, I'm tempted to turn the question on its head: it isn't so much about what history tells us about the present, but more what the present moment tells us about the past. Personally, it's been very revealing coming to terms with a heightened awareness of mortality, being confined to a specific area, and having children underfoot while you're trying to work. For many of us, these aren't things that have been part of our everyday experience before, and in many ways what has been happening in our own small worlds gives us an insight into the past. That's the question I'm interested in: what can we learn about *then*?

ME: You mentioned that 2020 has seen the west reappraising colonialism and its legacy. Why do you think that issue seems to have come to the fore this year?

KG: We have seen a host of instances around the world, from January onward, in which inequities wrought by racial, capitalistic and colonial systems have come to a head. That's why, for many people in the west of certain backgrounds and classes, this appears to be a monumental moment of racial reckoning.

But I would point out that, for most people in what we can call 'subaltern' communities – people who have been colonised or been the object of colonial enterprise – all of this hasn't come out of nowhere. I think that one of the lessons that we can learn from this moment of crisis is that we need to pay more attention to the people who have lived and witnessed these events, both now and in the past.

Although it's heartbreaking, I don't think it's a surprise that most of the people dying of coronavirus in the US are from impoverished or African-American and Latino communities. These inequalities don't just suddenly appear. The cases of police brutality we have seen in the US in recent years don't just *happen*. As people in the groups I just cited will tell you, it's been a steadily building wave.

History isn't a prophecy that tells you what will happen, but it can indicate where things



Set in stone?

A statue of Winston Churchill in London, which has been at the heart of debates about the permanence of monuments to divisive historical figures

are heading. For years now – even, dare I say, as far back as the start of the century – groups of people around the world, from colonised subjects to indigenous people, were pointing to certain environmental and social patterns. But the people involved in shaping western thought weren't listening. And it's not as if, looking at the history of colonialism and empire, what's been happening this year is unthinkable and unimaginable.

So I'd argue that the issues raised by the Black Lives Matter movement aren't new, and they aren't localised. It's more accurate to say that it has caused the western world to come to a reckoning of what it has wrought.

SL: Yes, I agree. It's very much a case of us realising and recognising the relationship between the past and the present – that present injustices stem from the past and the stories that we continue to tell about it, the stories that we omit, and the stories we commemorate. Kerri's is a very good point – it's not like all of this has suddenly come out of nowhere. So the question is: why are people listening this year?

It could partly be because the pandemic made us slow down a bit, meaning that people have been paying more attention to what's going on in the world. I fear, however, that it's chiefly because there was footage. Think about the number of times in the past, since we've had cameras, that a photograph has become a defining image that pushed people to a response – [the 1972 photo of] the child running down the road from a napalm attack in the Vietnam War, for instance. So I think that it's the footage that has, in the end, moved people to feel that there cannot



// We increasingly realise that present injustices stem from the past and the stories we tell about it – and those we omit //

SUZANNAH LIPSCOMB



The past and the present
A protester in London in August 2020. "Black Lives Matter has had an instant impact in the UK," argues Michael Wood

be any more of these injustices. And that has made people focus on how we have got to this point. What is entrenched in our societies today as a result of history?

TH: I think it also shows that what happens in the US, and its pathologies and 'culture wars', remain a topic of obsessional interest to people in other countries – particularly English-speaking countries. All kinds of people have suffered terrible things this year; in a sense, the 'dog that hasn't barked in the night' so far in this conversation is the suffering of the Uighur people [a Muslim minority group who live predominantly in the Xinjiang province of north-western China]. A million people have been rounded up into what are effectively concentration camps, women have been sterilised, and an entire culture is being deliberately wiped out. Yet that's had no cut-through at all, I think in part – picking up on what Suzannah said – because we lack images. There is no footage. They speak a language that most of us don't speak. But, above all, *it's not American*.

The ability of America to project its drama around the world remains unrivalled. I do think that the civil rights movement had a greater cut-through beyond English-speaking lands, and that the ideals it articulated were admired and taken up more widely. As far as I can tell, attitudes towards Black Lives Matter and the 'culture wars' more generally are more ambivalent.

MW: I'd argue that the Black Lives Matter movement has had an instant impact in the UK. I agree with Suzannah that technology has made a big difference. A younger



// What happens in the United States remains a topic of obsessional interest in other countries – particularly English-speaking nations //

TOM HOLLAND

generation has grown up well-informed about modern history via the media, the internet and social media. They can look it all up.

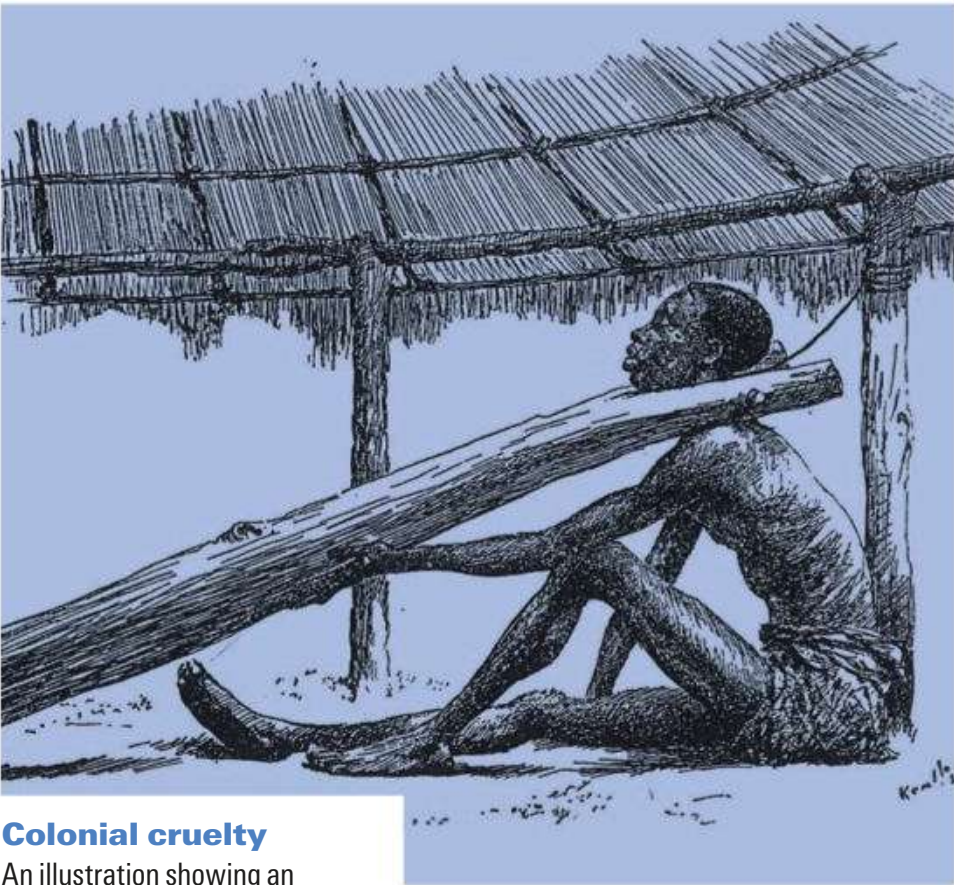
Black Lives Matter has been important in the British world not only in terms of black lives mattering – as obviously important as that is – but also in terms of what it has told us about our own historical experience of having ruled an empire across the world for so long. I would say that the British empire is the single most important fact in the past 400 years of British history, and it's an experience that we haven't, as a culture, really faced up to.

So the ongoing 'culture wars' are not only about Black Lives Matter: that movement has sparked off other important lines of enquiry. Suzannah mentioned the letters the British government sent to organisations such as English Heritage and the National Trust, effectively telling them that, because they are publicly funded bodies, they have to toe the line. Another remarkable moment for historians was when the prime minister tweeted [in response to a statue of Churchill being defaced in June] that "we cannot pretend to have a different history". The whole *point* is that history is constantly rewritten and re-understood by every generation.

The Black Lives Matter movement is one of the forces that has made people here and around the world look again at the impacts of the colonial enterprise, and the structural racism that accompanied imperialism. And it's unleashed a wider critique: how are we going to understand our history now? How are we going to teach it, now that we have begun to develop a better understanding of how deeply ingrained slavery and its legacy are in British culture? This has always been a

Global concerns

People in Istanbul protest China’s treatment of Uighur Muslims, October 2020. Our experts disagreed about the extent to which their plight has been recognised in nations around the world



Colonial cruelty

An illustration showing an enslaved man in the Congo Free State, c1890. The legacy of slavery and imperialism has repeatedly made the headlines in 2020

Religious schism

Prayers are held in Istanbul’s Hagia Sofia following its conversion to a mosque in July 2020 – suggesting a possible shift in Turkey’s attitude to western secularism



GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

huge deal in the US, because African-Americans are descended from people who were taken by force to the Americas. But in Britain, it all happened somewhere *out there*. That's why this is part of a bigger revolt. It seems to me that history has never been so politicised, and I remember how politicised it was under Margaret Thatcher – who, for instance, wrote the foreword to a pamphlet about the teaching of history by Lord Hugh Thomas, explicitly renouncing the so-called Marxist school that I grew up with as a student.

TH: But isn't this basically an Anglo-American story? It's about what happened in the Atlantic world from the 17th to the 20th centuries. When I look at places such as France or Belgium – nations that also have a colonial legacy – I'm not convinced I see it cutting through there, or in India or China.

KG: It's everywhere, and I would argue that, if you're not seeing that for some reason, it's because of media bias. We need to look at the news within the nations and regions in which the subaltern groups I referred to earlier live.

You mentioned the Uighurs, Tom, and, interestingly, Black Lives Matter groups in the US and Australia were highlighting the atrocities committed against Uighur people when the issue was not as rigorously highlighted in the mainstream press. I think we have to move beyond thinking that, if we don't see something in mainstream media coverage, it must not exist. Indeed, one of the things that I think the study of history requires us to do is look critically at sources – and as historians, we can also do that in real time with our current moment. I never take what I see or what I believe at face value – because we know there were many people in the past who said: "What I believe must be true," and we know how *that* often turned out.

Take, for instance, the atrocities that took place in the Congo Free State at the turn of the 20th century [including violence against, and the forced labour of, the region's indigenous people]. We know that most people in the west at the time didn't believe those things were happening, but the fact that we now know that those terrible things *did* happen should teach us to evaluate our own period more closely.

So among the many lessons we can learn from 2020 is that we should interrogate our own assumptions. Is what we believe about what's happening now accurate? As historians, we know that these kind of misjudgments happen all the time: after all, it's part of what makes history fascinating.

TH: But I think that one of the sources of privilege for English speakers – particularly in Britain and, more recently, the US – is to

assume that their concerns are of universal import. Why is the name of George Floyd [an African-American man killed during an arrest in May, whose death sparked global protests] spoken on London's streets, but not the name of a Uighur person? It's because of the huge cultural hegemony the US wields. I think that 2020 will come to be seen as the year in which the conceit of people in the west that their values and concerns are universal will come to be seen as just that – a conceit.

Other things have happened this year, too, that suggest the values we in the west have always assumed as being part of everyone's mental framework are coming under stress. One example is Turkey's president converting the Hagia Sophia from a museum into a mosque in July, essentially rejecting the model of secularism which I think people in the west tend to take for granted. I believe



// History has never been so politicised – and I remember how politicised it was under Thatcher in the 1980s //

MICHAEL WOOD

we are moving into a culturally multi-polar world in which universalism is in retreat.

ME: We've talked about both history and politics. Do you think there is any danger of history becoming *too* politicised?

KG: History is always political. As this debate shows, people see history in different ways – and some people have always been excluded from the conversation. It's dangerous to argue, for instance, that forcing empires to account for themselves is more political than not requiring them to do so, because both are political acts. Arguing that history doesn't have to take colonial legacies into account is no less political than arguing that it does. Both views have just as much of an agenda.

SL: When I was a PhD student, somebody said to me – completely without irony – that they, as an atheist, were singularly able to have an unbiased opinion on the struggle between Catholics and Protestants. But I hope that we're now beginning to more widely recognise what historians have always known: that we all bring our subjectivities to determine the nature of the past that we tell.

We need to be honest about the lens we put in front of our vision. The idea that history shouldn't change or be rewritten is baloney. We continually rewrite history, because we are always speaking from our present position – historically and geographically. The key is to work out that perspective and try to account for it, or discount it, as much as possible, knowing that we will never fully compensate for the biases we naturally have.

TH: History will always be political for the same reason that politics will always be rooted in history. There are never any definitive answers, and people will always disagree. All of the convulsive issues that we face here in Britain are rooted in people's perspectives on history. Brexit, essentially, is an argument about history. Whether the UK should cohere or Scotland will vote to leave is essentially a debate about history. If you broaden that out to almost anywhere there are political tensions – essentially everywhere in the world! – those arguments tend to be about history.

MW: All of what we have talked about here goes to show why history matters. Clearly it gives value and meaning to our lives. I agree with Kerri that history may not be a prophecy, but it sure as hell gives you some sense of where we might be heading. **H**

MORE FROM US

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Georg Elser

Hitler's would-be killer

In the latest instalment of our occasional series profiling remarkable yet unheralded characters from history, **ROGER MOORHOUSE** introduces a little-known carpenter-turned-assassin whose daring attempt to kill Hitler almost succeeded

Shortly after 9pm on 8 November 1939, a Munich beer hall – the Bürgerbräukeller – was clearing up after one of Hitler's speeches. Earlier in the evening, approximately 3,000 faithful Nazis had thronged the hall, but now, with Hitler departed, the last of the party veterans, the 'Old Fighters', were collecting their possessions and saying their goodbyes, leaving behind only the beer hall's staff and a handful of musicians.

Then, at 9.20pm exactly, the hubbub was shattered by an explosion. In a flash, the room filled with smoke and dust, and a blast wave raced through the building, shattering windows and blowing out doors. The tables and stools in the centre of the hall were splintered to matchwood; the central pillar was destroyed, and both the gallery and the ceiling came crashing down into the room. The dais and lectern, where Hitler had been standing, were crushed.

One traumatised eyewitness recalled: "There was a bright light, and in the same instant we heard a terrible blast. I was thrown back two metres, falling into the rubble, while all hell broke loose above me. When I came to my senses, I was lying on my stomach with my right arm over the foot of my comrade. I did not know at the time that he was already dead."

The dead man was one of three killed outright by the terrible explosion; more than 60 more were injured, five fatally. Those that weren't too badly wounded freed themselves from the rubble, emerging bloodied and

covered in dust, many assuming that they had fallen victim to an air raid. One of their number was more perceptive, however, concluding that the destruction had been caused by a bomb intended to kill their beloved führer. "My God," he gasped, "what bestial brain could have conceived such an atrocity?"

That "bestial brain" belonged to Georg Elser, a 36-year-old carpenter from Swabia in south-western Germany. Small in stature, with unruly, dark hair, and a pinched, slightly troubled expression, Elser had been an average school pupil

and was something of a loner, with few friends and an innate contentment with his own company. Growing up in rural poverty, he had been apprenticed as a carpenter and eked out a meagre living from woodworking.

Unlike many of his fellows, however, Elser despised Hitler, blaming the Nazis – rather than the strict terms of the Treaty of Versailles, or the Jews – for his straitened circumstances. Typical in this regard was his reaction when a Nazi parade marched through his home town of Königsbrunn in 1938. Elser turned out to watch, but as those around him gave the Hitler salute, he refused to do likewise. When a neighbour reminded him that it might be sensible to conform, he replied: "You can kiss my arse."

Yet, rather than surrender to impotent rage, Elser decided to act. That autumn, as war appeared to loom during the Czech Crisis, he resolved that he was going to assassinate Hitler. Telling no one, he began to plot, and after visiting Munich in 1938 to observe the Nazi ceremonies surrounding the anniversary of the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch, he spotted a golden opportunity.

Armed with a purpose

Elser set to work with a will. First, he took a job in an armaments factory in his home town, where he stole a fuse and some gunpowder. Then he found another job in a nearby quarry, where he acquired explosives and a detonator. Having no experience of such matters, he experimented, testing prototype bombs in the fields around his home.

In the spring of 1939, he returned to Munich, making detailed sketches of the hall of the Bürgerbräukeller, where he planned his attack. He saw the ideal location for his bomb: behind the lectern where a thick stone pillar supported an upper gallery that ran the length of the hall. An explosion there, he reckoned, would not only kill those in its immediate vicinity, but it could also bring down the heavy balcony above.

Throughout eight months of plotting, Elser divulged the truth of his activities to no one. If asked what he was making in his workshop, he would reply simply: "An invention." And, when pressed by an intrigued colleague if his invention was an alarm clock that would ring and simultaneously activate a light, he answered evasively: "Yes, something like that."

In early August 1939, Elser finally moved to Munich, taking with him his tools, his bomb, six clock movements,

// A blast wave raced through the building, and the dais and lectern, where Hitler had been standing, were both crushed //



ILLUSTRATION BY ELEANOR SHAKESPEARE

detonators, wire, fuses and a battery. His *modus operandi* was simple. He would visit the Bürgerbräukeller every night at around 9pm to take his evening meal. Later, he would sneak upstairs, where he would hide in a storeroom until the bar closed. Then, he would work by torchlight to hollow out a cavity in the pillar to accommodate his bomb: every sound had to be muffled, every speck of brick dust collected. He could afford to leave no evidence of his presence. At 7.30am, when the bar staff returned, he would then sneak out of a back entrance.

By day, Elser worked on his timer and detonator. He planned to be safely in Switzerland by the time his bomb exploded, so he needed to build a timer that could be set several days in advance. His solution was to modify a clock movement, adding extra cogs and levers, to create a timer that could run for a maximum of 144 hours before activating a lever, attached to a detonator. For good measure, he then added a second clock mechanism to act as a failsafe.

On the night of 2 November, two months after he had

started work in earnest, he finally installed his bomb in the pillar. Three nights later he added the timer. It was set to explode at 9.20pm on the evening of 8 November – right in the middle of Hitler's speech.

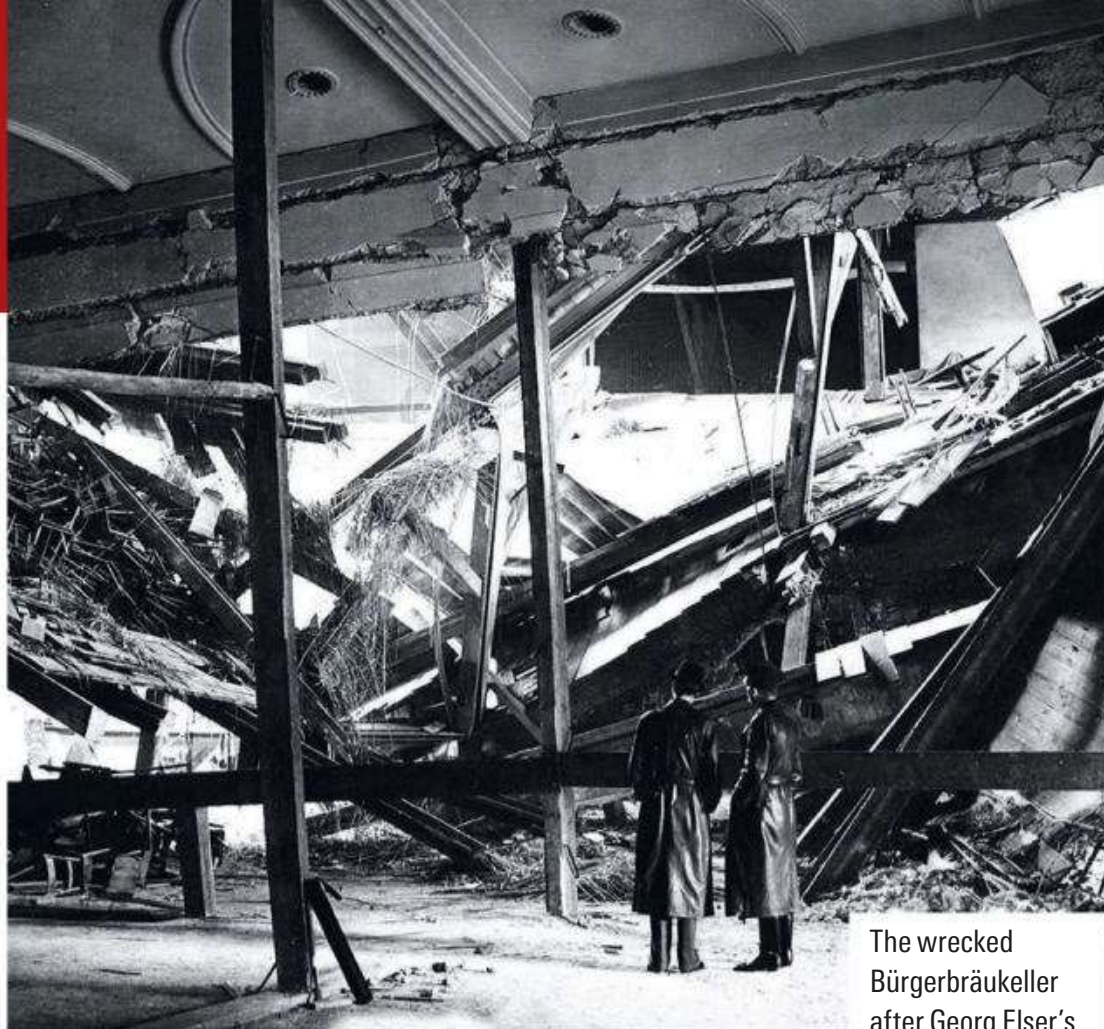
A narrow escape

Hitler had arrived in Munich earlier that day. He had initially wanted to cancel his Bürgerbräukeller speech, given the pressure of work that awaited him in Berlin, but the commemorations were one of the highlights of the Nazi calendar. He resolved to attend the ceremony but insisted he had to be back in the capital that same night. When fog was forecast, he decided to return by train, thereby necessitating a shortening of the traditional programme of events. The address to the 'Old Fighters', therefore, would begin earlier than usual and end at 9pm.

The speech followed the usual script. Hitler raged against the perfidy of the British and the injustice of Versailles, working himself into a spit-flecked theatrical



Hitler speaks at the memorial to the Beer Hall Putsch on the evening of 8 November 1939. As fog was forecast, the führer decided to leave the event earlier than planned so he could return to Berlin by train that night



The wrecked Bürgerbräukeller after Georg Elser's bomb detonated at 9.20pm. The bomb did not take Hitler's life, as he had left 13 minutes before the explosion



Georg Elser (left) is interrogated at the Gestapo headquarters in the wake of his abortive assassination attempt. He was eventually executed in Dachau in 1945

frenzy and culminating in a lauding of the Nazi movement for its restoration of German "honour". He ended, following a chorus of "Sieg Heils", and left the hall just after 9pm to take his train to Berlin. Thirteen minutes later, Elser's bomb exploded.

As we know, Hitler was unharmed. Safely ensconced on his train, he blanched when he heard about the explosion, then concluded that providence was sparing him for

greater things. His SS and police chief, Heinrich Himmler, meanwhile, was already planning round-ups of suspects and a revamp of Hitler's security.

Elser, of course, was far away. He had hoped to be in Switzerland by the time the bomb exploded, but he hadn't reckoned on the efficiency of German border guards, who apprehended him close to the frontier. When a search of his pockets then revealed some fuse wire and a postcard of the Bürgerbräukeller, he was handed over to the Gestapo for interrogation. He spent the next five and a

half years in isolation from other prisoners in two concentration camps, before being summarily executed in Dachau, in April 1945.

Other than Claus von Stauffenberg, who planted a bomb at Hitler's headquarters in July 1944, Elser came closest to killing the German leader: but for some fog in Munich that night, he would almost certainly have achieved his aim. And yet, until comparatively recently, the name of Georg Elser has languished in obscurity, a footnote to the wider story of the German resistance.

But Elser's is arguably the greater achievement. A simple man, he did not benefit from the aristocratic background that von Stauffenberg did, nor did he have any support network to provide emotional or technological succour. Moreover, he saw the essential bestial truth of Nazism already in 1938, at a time when most Germans – including von Stauffenberg – were still enamoured with Hitler. Elser, then, fully deserves his place in the pantheon of the German resistance. More than that, he deserves the respect that has been denied him for so long. **H**

Roger Moorhouse is a historian and author, and a visiting professor at the College of Europe in Warsaw. His books include *First to Fight: The Polish War 1939* (Bodley Head, 2019) and *Killing Hitler* (Jonathan Cape, 2006)

// Other than Claus von Stauffenberg, Georg Elser came closest to killing Hitler: but for some fog, he would have succeeded //

A taste for strange meats and husbands' buttocks

From chewing coal to salivating over starch and shells, pregnant women in early modern England were consumed by a number of outlandish cravings. **Jennifer Evans** explores how doctors made sense of these bizarre – and sometimes dangerous – desires

"All women when they are with child; do fall commonly from one longing to another," wrote one 17th-century author – and those longings included apricots, pea pods and coal (pictured)

Pregnancy cravings

Women can experience intense food cravings in pregnancy. They plough through pickles, gorge on eggs, fantasise about mustard, and devour entire tubs of ice cream. And if early modern writers and medical practitioners are to be believed, some have been known to hanker after human flesh.

Our predecessors in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries were keenly aware of the link between pregnancy and food cravings, and devoted a great deal of time to analysing these urges – whether they were for traditional sources of sustenance or something altogether more unusual.

It was widely accepted that, in the words of the popular medical writer Nicholas Culpeper, cravings were one of the “chiefest sign[s] of conception”, and that what followed, according to the author John Sadler, would be “a longing desire for strange meats” (“meats” being a term to describe a range of foodstuffs).

The author of a satirical piece published in 1682, entitled *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage*, suggested that cravings were so common that “all women when they are with child; do fall commonly from one longing to another”. He complained to his readers – whom he assumed included the husbands of such women – that in the summer their wives would crave “China oranges, sivil lemmons, the largest asparagus, strawberries with wine and sugar, cherries of all sorts, and... plums”. These extravagant appetites were no cause for concern for the pregnant woman themselves, the author wrote. But, he bemoaned, it was a different story for the long-suffering husbands and servants who were required to “trot out” long after dark to procure such delicacies.

In John Webster’s play *The Duchess of Malfi*, first performed around 1613–14, Daniel de Bosola attempts to discover if the eponymous duchess is pregnant by presenting her with a bowl of apricots, which were known to be a favourite of pregnant women. When she greedily devoured the gift, his suspicions were confirmed and made plain for all to see, as the apricots subsequently brought on the duchess’s labour pains.

An unfulfilled longing

As well as describing (often in great detail) women’s pregnancy cravings, early modern writers spent a great deal of time theorising about what they meant for both mother and child. Some concluded that denying such cravings could have negative consequences for the unborn baby. For example, they



ABOVE: Doctors believed that an unfulfilled craving for strawberries – depicted in a still life from 1704 – was a cause of red birthmarks

BELOW: Pregnant women – like the one shown here shopping for beef in an engraving from 1710 – were advised to both listen to and ignore their cravings

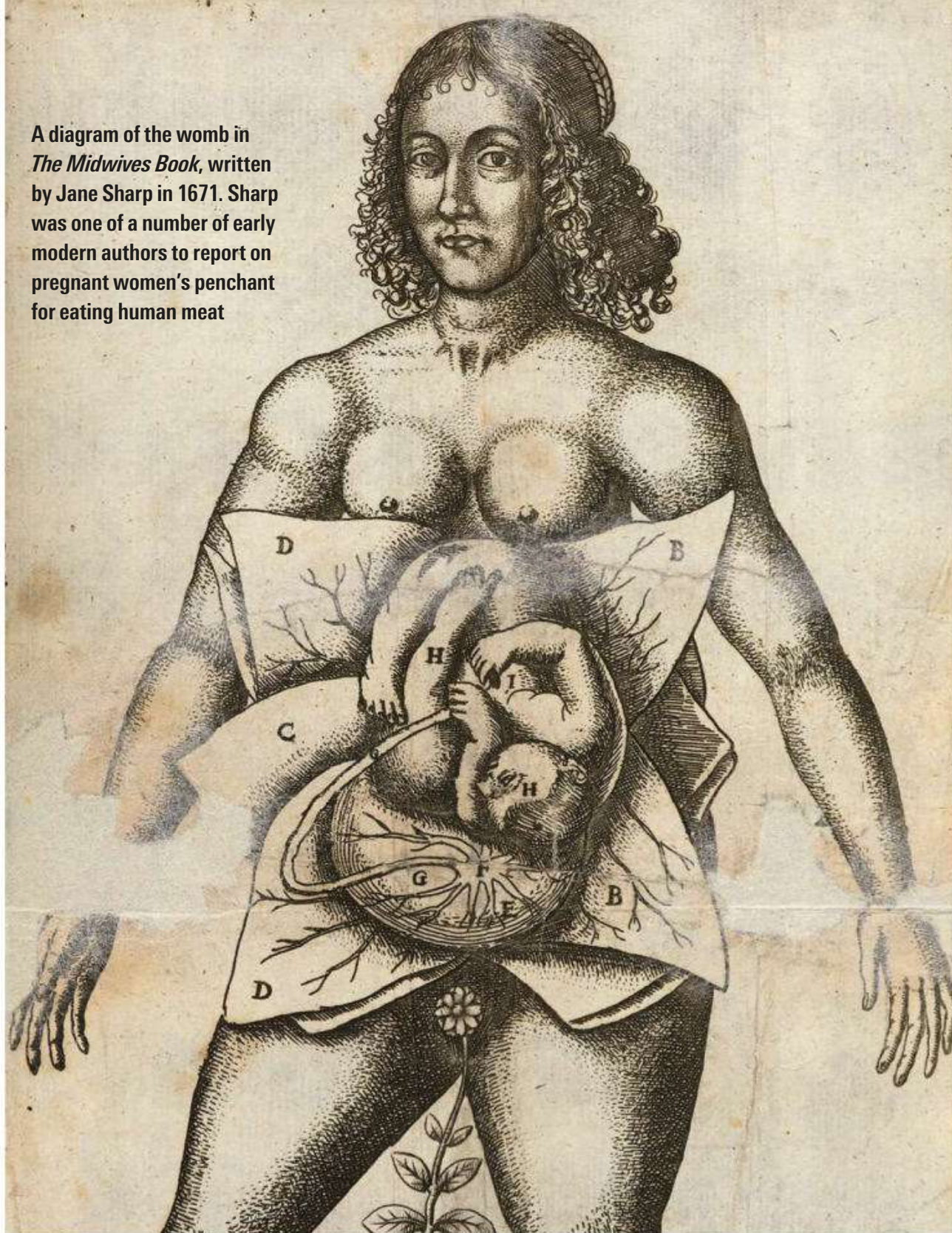


believed that an unfulfilled desire for strawberries or red wine could cause the appearance of red birthmarks, what we would now perhaps call a strawberry nevus or strawberry haemangioma. “The woman must not lose her longing, for the child might get a blemish by it,” opined the author of *The Ten Pleasures*.

Yet, according to some contemporaries, failing to acknowledge and appease pregnancy cravings potentially posed far greater dangers than birthmarks. The 18th-century midwife Sarah Stone, who worked in Taunton and Bristol, described a woman who at eight months pregnant experienced a great “flooding” (loss of blood). Stone believed this was caused by an unfulfilled longing, but her patient staunchly denied that she had wanted for anything. Stone warned the mother-to-be rather emphatically that “both she and the child would doubtless lose their lives, unless she speedily had what she had an inclination for”. At this, the expectant mother finally replied that she longed for nothing “except a Peasecod [pea pod], that she saw a boy hold up against the sun”, after which she started to experience pain.

Stone reported that she had a local gentleman send some pea pods from his garden. Happily, as soon as the woman had eaten them, her bleeding stopped, and she went on to give birth to a healthy son. This might be the only example of an unsated craving causing serious ill health to appear in Stone’s collection of case notes, *A Complete Practice*

A diagram of the womb in *The Midwives Book*, written by Jane Sharp in 1671. Sharp was one of a number of early modern authors to report on pregnant women's penchant for eating human meat



of *Midwifery*, but she was confident that “such things as these frequently happen”.

Unrequited longings weren't the only craving-related phenomenon to cause concern to medical practitioners in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Early modern authors noted that some women displayed an excessive desire for nutritious foods – a condition they described as *malacia*. A translation of a German text, *Etmullerus Abridg'd: or, A Compleat System of the Theory and Practice of Physic*, written by the Leipzig physician Michael Ettmüller, stated that this entailed a “violent and insatiable longing for usual food, as Herrins, and such like”.

But what if the pregnancy cravings became even more unorthodox? What if they drove the woman to consume materials that we don't typically classify as food? We know that reports of such cravings reached the ears of early modern writers and that they called the condition ‘pica’. The term ‘pica’ is derived from the Latin for magpie, presumably because those with the affliction collected all manner of bizarre items to eat.

Contemporaries report that women suffering from pica consumed everything

from earth and ashes to coals and shells. Yet perhaps most unusually of all, some also apparently developed an appetite for human flesh. Jane Sharp wrote in her 1671 midwifery guide, *The Midwives Book*, that the seventh sign that a woman was with child was that “she hath a preternatural desire to something not fit to eat nor drink, as some women with child have longed to bite off a piece of their Husbands' Buttocks”. Daniel Sennert's *Practical Physick* (1664) even claimed that one woman, “though she loved him [her husband] very well, [had] killed him, eat part, and powdered the rest” to satisfy her desire for his flesh.

This tendency towards cannibalism was also mentioned in an English edition of Felix Platter's medical text *A Golden Practice of Physick*, which warned that “some love raw flesh like meneaters, some have been like beasts and bitten peoples arms by violence”.

Vicious humours

Pica was evidently the cause of some consternation in early modern England. But medical experts disagreed as to how damaging the condition was to the sufferer herself. A number of books argued that the very cause of the problem – a build-up of vicious (or diseased) humours in the stomach – allowed women to digest these items safely. According to scientific thought at the time, the body was comprised of a balance of humours – blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile – but these humours would corrupt if someone suffered from disease, or consumed too much food or drink that couldn't be properly digested. One author described how the stomachs of women suffering from pica could “digest without any trouble or harm, a great many noxious and offensive objects”, provided that they didn't eat in such vast quantities that their bodies were overwhelmed.

However, John Sadler offered a harsher warning about the condition, writing that the “eating of corrupt meates, as in the disordinate longing called pica, unto which breeding women are often subject” could cause a “schirrositie” (hard growths or fibrosis) or hardness to develop in the womb. Jane Sharp was similarly explicit that pregnant women had to be reasoned with, for if they couldn't be dissuaded from eating such things then they would miscarry.

The idea that pica posed a serious threat to pregnant women endured over the decades, and a 1741 edition of *Aristotle's Works Completed* copied Sadler's sentiment verbatim. A posthumous edition of Michael Ettmüller's medical treatise likewise offered stark warning about the dangers of this condition. It claimed that though eating “absurd and uncommon things” caused no

One pregnant wife, though she loved her husband, “killed him, ate part, and powdered the rest”

Pregnancy cravings

“visible disturbance” in the short term, over time such a diet caused a build-up of “deprav’d humours in the body”. This could lead to dropsy, cachexies (malnutrition and wasting), and other unpleasant symptoms.

For pregnant women, then, the dire effects of indulging their cravings had to be weighed against the dangers inherent in denying them, which could lead to “bad consequences happening to the child in the belly”. This posed a medical conundrum, one in which women were damned if they did and damned if they didn’t.

But medical practitioners did offer some consolation to pica sufferers. According to the Scottish obstetrician and male midwife William Smellie, the dangers that the condition posed to the baby faded in the fourth month of pregnancy. And, in a bid to reduce the likelihood of pica leading to miscarriage, Culpeper’s *Directory for Midwives* offered a remedy that “keeps the child from suffering by the mothers appetite”, made from the juice of vine leaves and syrup of quinces.

A taste for chalk and ashes

Pregnant women were not alone in being prone to pica. Medical writers frequently listed the condition as a symptom of greensickness, which is no longer a recognised condition. Known as ‘chlorosis’ in the 19th century, greensickness was peculiar to adolescent girls and was thought to be caused by the obstruction of menstruation or the retention of ‘seed’ within the body. This excess menstrual blood, it was believed, travelled to the digestive tract where it triggered the desire to consume unnatural foods.

Jane Sharp wrote of greensickness sufferers that they “will be always eating oatmeal, scrapings of the wall, earth, or ashes, or chalk, and will drink vinegar”. Likewise, Robert Johnson’s *Manual of Physic* reported that they ate “coals, ashes, clay, turfs, leather and I know not what”.

The popular reproduction manual *Aristoteles Master-piece* (1684) claimed, rather unusually, that it was the eating of chalk, oatmeal, tobacco-pipes, loam, starch, nutmegs, and drinking vinegar that caused the build up of undigested humours in the bowels, which then made the disease difficult to shake off. Consuming such foods, noted Sharp, would lead to girls’ bodies becoming “loose and spongy, and they grow lazy, and idle, and will hardly stir”.

Curing the condition in both unmarried and pregnant women necessitated emptying the stomach of the harmful matter that provoked the cravings. To this end, medical authors recommended that women were purged and made to vomit. Some writers



A woman faints in a c1744 oil on canvas. Doctors argued that eating “absurd and uncommon things” could cause malnutrition and wasting in pregnant women, but not everyone agreed

Greensickness sufferers consumed “coals, ashes, clay, turfs, leather and I know not what”



The leading midwife William Smellie argued that the urge to consume non-foodstuffs began to fade four months into pregnancy

suggested that when the patient was pregnant, ‘gentle’ purges and emetics should be employed. They also advised that the stomach be strengthened with cinnamon water, orange pills and remedies made from coral.

Robert Johnson warned that women who suffered from greensickness for a long time might find themselves infertile. Yet there was a potential cure – one that would relieve their greensickness and, presumably, also their pica, too – and that was to get married and engage in sexual activity. In other words, greensickness sufferers should take their chances with another cause of intense food cravings: pregnancy. Once again, for the young women of early modern England, it was a case of damned if you do, damned if you don’t. **H**

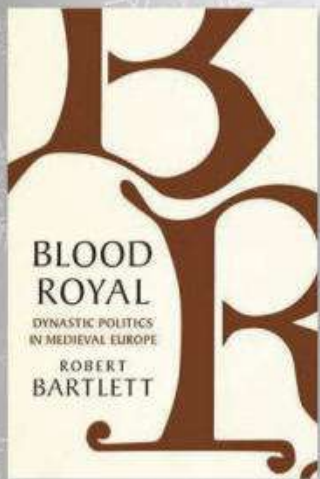
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Jennifer Evans is senior lecturer in history at the University of Hertfordshire. Her book *Men’s Sexual Health in Early Modern England* is set to be published by Amsterdam University Press in 2021

WATCH

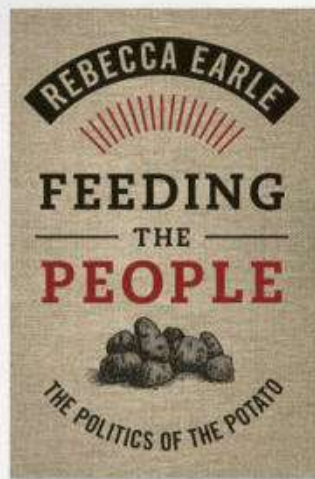
Episode four of the seventh series of BBC One drama **Call the Midwife** addressed the issue of unusual pregnancy cravings. You’ll find it at bbc.co.uk/iplayer



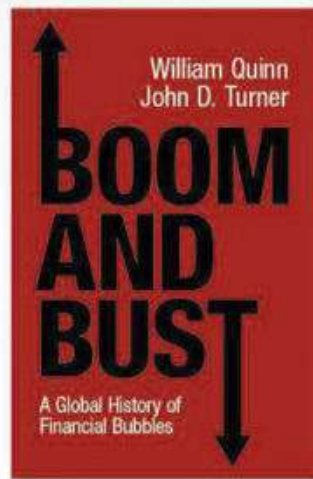
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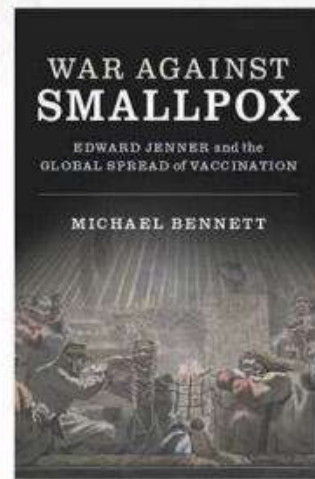
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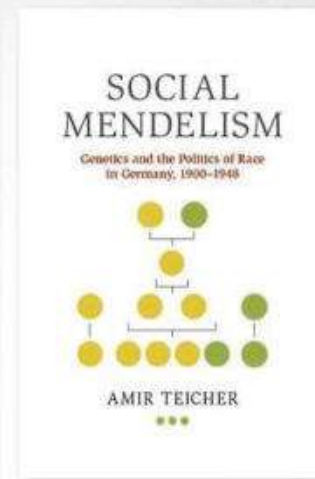
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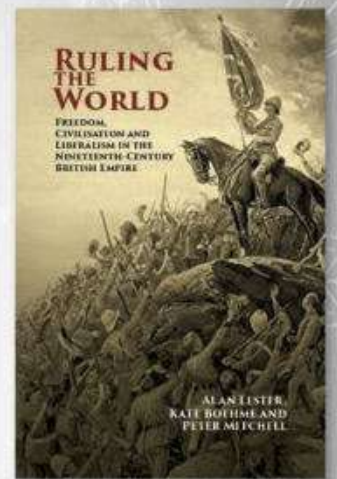
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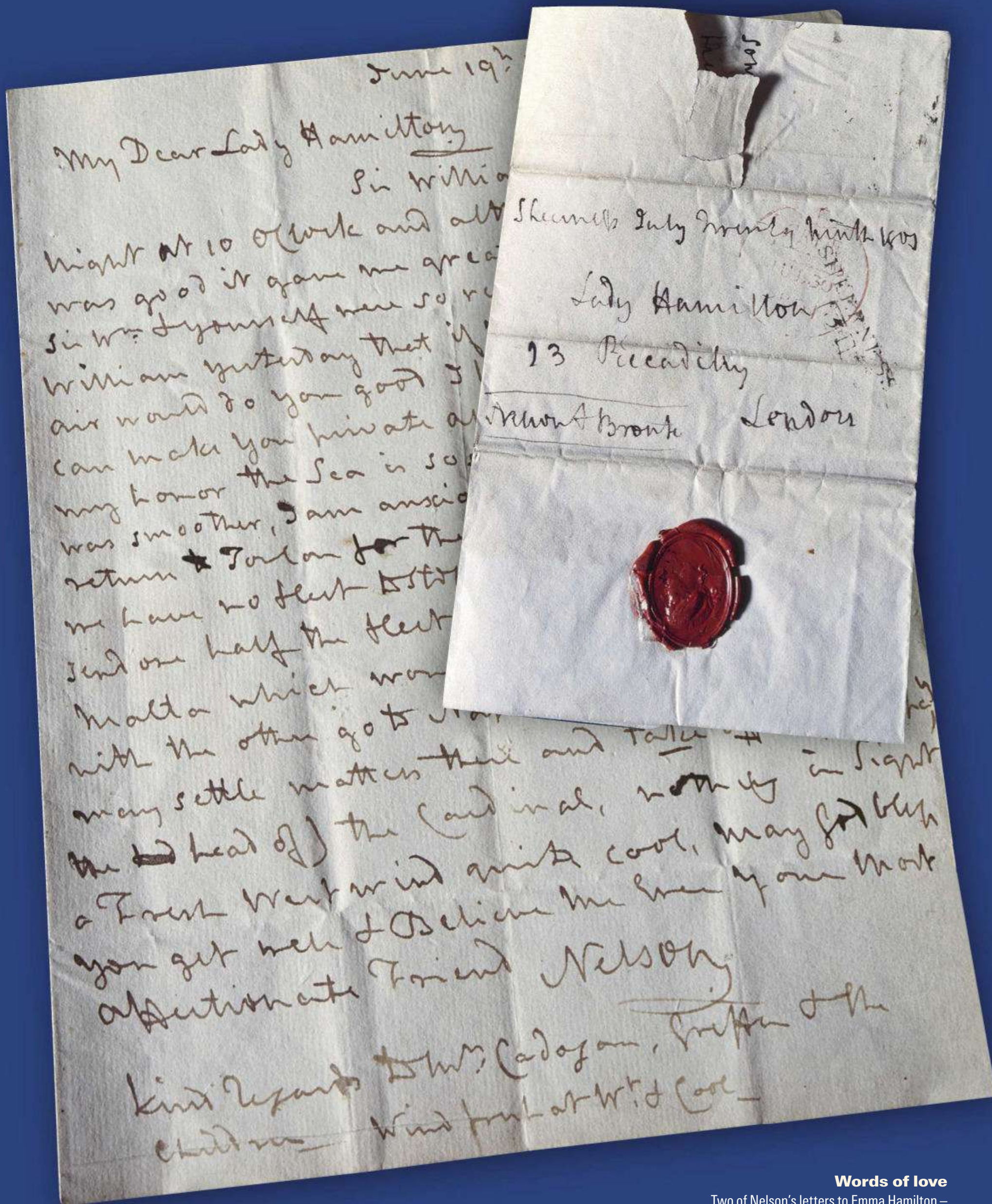
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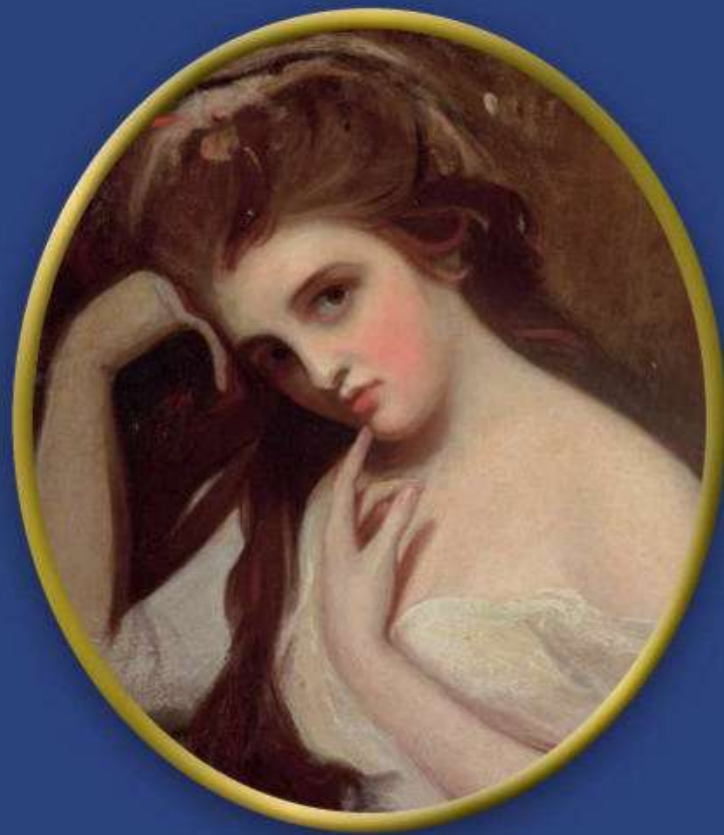
Words of love

Two of Nelson's letters to Emma Hamilton – from 1801 (top) and 1799. An impoverished Emma pawned many of the messages to friends

“Would to God I had dined alone with you. What a dessert we would have had”

Horatio Nelson’s letters to his lover Emma Hamilton offer an unparalleled insight into the mind of the naval hero.

Marianne Czisnik, editor of a new collection of the letters, reveals what they tell us about Nelson’s thinking on everything from fame and politics to war and romance



Yours sincerely

Nelson’s passion for Emma – with whom he had a six-year affair – is writ large in his letters, which were sometimes his only means of communicating with her for months on end

The relationship between Horatio Nelson and Emma Lady Hamilton is one of history's most notorious love stories. Over the course of their affair – which began in Naples in 1799, produced a daughter, Horatia, in 1801, and ended with Nelson's death at the battle of Trafalgar in 1805 – the couple exchanged hundreds of letters.

Due to repeated and often prolonged spells of separation, one of which stretched to two years, these intimate messages were a vital means of communication between the two lovers. Sadly, Nelson appears to have burned nearly all of his letters from Emma in order to keep them from being discovered on board ship. (Both were married – Emma to Sir William Hamilton, the British envoy to Naples, and Nelson to the patient Frances.)

Lady Hamilton, however, kept all the letters she received – for as long as she could. On falling into poverty after Nelson's death, she gave them as pawns to friends who lent her money. Over the course of the centuries since, the letters have been leaked.

The first selection was published in 1814, when Lady Hamilton was still alive. The damage that its publication inflicted on her reputation hurried her to an early death in 1815, in Calais, where she had fled from her creditors. It had a significant impact on Nelson's posthumous stature, too. During the course of the 19th century, two more substantial publications of letters followed, one in 1849, hidden in what was termed *Memoirs of the Life of Vice-Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson*, and one in 1892–93 in a two-volume work that was merely printed for private circulation and thus hardly noticed in public. By the end of the 19th century, as he was reimagined as a figurehead of the naval arms race with Germany, Nelson's relationship with this great beauty and celebrated artists' model had been brushed under the carpet.

Over time, most of the letters found their ways into archives – both public and private, scattered from Europe to California. Some of those that Emma gave away as pawns still keep coming up at auction. All those accessible in archives or known from printed sources have recently been published together for the first time in *Nelson's Letters to Lady Hamilton*, a book that I have edited for the Navy Records Society.

Nelson's correspondence with Emma offers historians an unprecedented insight into his experiences as a rising star of the Royal Navy and his opinions on everything from politics and romance to seafaring and celebrity – as the following examples reveal...

LIFE AT SEA

"I am so dreadfully sea sick that I cannot hold up my head"

Life on board a naval vessel in the early 19th century was far from comfortable and Nelson didn't fare much better than his crews. Even though he enjoyed the comparative luxury of a spacious cabin, he, too, was affected by illness, harsh weather conditions, food shortages and monotony.

When given command of the British fleet in the Mediterranean in 1803, he had to sail out in a frigate and wrote to Emma after two months at sea. "We are anxious for the *Victory's* joining as we are almost eating salt beef." Half a year later he told her: "Our days pass so much alike that having described one you have them all."

Bad food and boredom weren't the only threats to a sailor's wellbeing. Diseases could sweep through a ship at any time – which is why, in October 1804, Nelson was delighted to report: "My dearest Emma, the dreadful effects of the yellow fever at Gibraltar and many parts of Spain will naturally give you much uneasiness 'till you hear that thank God we are entirely free from it and in the most

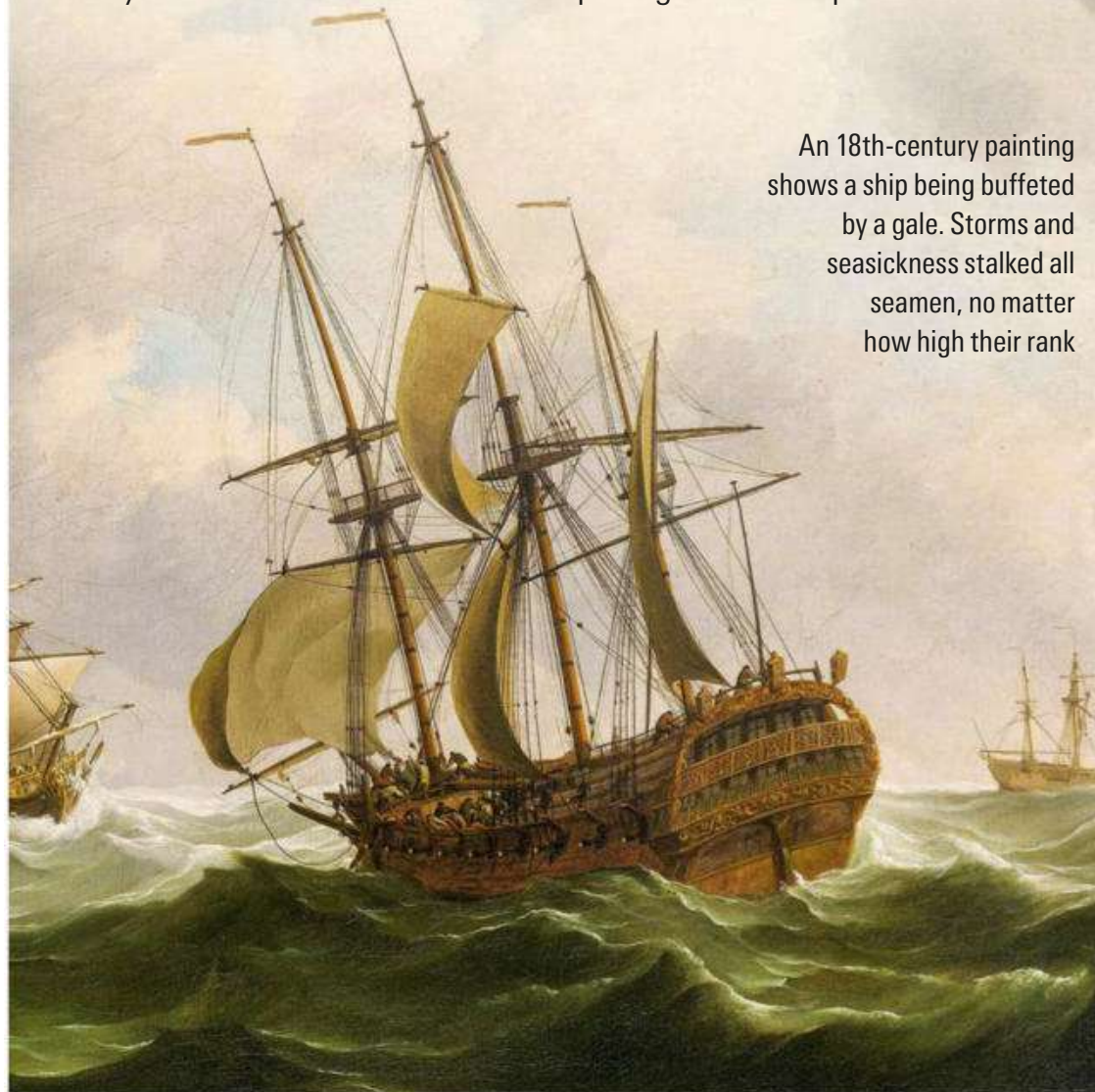
perfect health, not one man being ill in the fleet."

Nelson sounded far less buoyant in August 1801 when confessing: "I am so dreadfully sea sick that I cannot hold up my head." During another buffeting by high winds that same year, he lamented: "The sea is so very high, that I scarcely expect the possibility of getting a boat with this weather; she would be lost in an instant... in my after-cabin the motion is so great that I cannot sit down. We have only to trust to our cables, for the sea is breaking against the rocks mountains high."

Nelson's letters to his lover convey not only the highs and lows of life at sea but also the persistent anxiety that stalked the crew of a great man-of-war. Whether you were a lowly new recruit or a lionised admiral, your life depended on the strength of a ship's cables.

Perhaps it was Nelson's admission that he experienced fear – a confession at odds with the carefully crafted image of the naval hero – that made 19th-century authors omit this passage from their publications.

An 18th-century painting shows a ship being buffeted by a gale. Storms and seasickness stalked all seamen, no matter how high their rank





A painting shows Nelson and Emma in Naples. The couple were rarely alone together during their six-year affair

ROMANCE

“You may readily imagine what must be my sensations at the idea of sleeping with you”

Far away from home, Nelson was often without news from Britain – and Emma – for months on end. In order to stay connected, the lovers had to trust to unreliable means of communication, sometimes via Spain, and even through France, with which Britain was at war at the time.

As Nelson and Emma were rarely alone together (for most of their affair, she lived with her husband, Sir William Hamilton, who appears to have tolerated their relationship), they had to concentrate their erotic life on short and intense moments – and leave much to the imagination. “You may readily imagine what must be my sensations at the idea of sleeping with you, it sets me on fire even the thoughts, much more would the reality,” Nelson wrote to Emma on 1 March 1801. On the same day, he noted in another passionate letter: “Would to God I had dined alone with you. What a des[s]ert we would have had.”

Writing on the *Victory* in the Mediterranean in October 1804, Nelson was just as affectionate, though a little more restrained. “...my own Emma, you must only fancy all my thoughts and feelings towards you, they are every thing which a fond heart can fancy. I have not a moment; I am writing + signing orders whilst I am writing to my own Emma. My life my soul, God in heaven bless you.”

WIKI/GETTY IMAGES

POLITICS

“I most sincerely hope that by the destruction of Buonaparte that wars with all nations will cease”

Along with descriptions of the mundanity of life at sea and heartfelt expressions of affection, Nelson’s letters to Emma also reveal his views on international relations and Europe’s power-holding elite. He readily shared gossip about leading political and public figures but was not prepared to spend too much time pondering what this gossip meant. “Report says, she [the Queen of Naples] and the king are likely at last to have a serious rupture... However, I never trouble myself with these matters, they may settle their own affairs, they are *old* enough.”

William Pitt the Younger, two-time prime minister, played a huge role in marshalling Britain’s war effort against Napoleon’s France. When Pitt resigned in 1801, Nelson wrote to Emma: “I am sorry Mr Pitt is out. I think him the greatest minister this country ever had, and the honestest man.” Unfortunately, Nelson does not elaborate on his reasons for this

assessment. His matter-of-fact writing style resembled more the entries into a logbook than a fully developed political tract.

Nelson could, however, be crystal clear in his political observations. Following the battle of Copenhagen [for more on this see overleaf], he observed: “I look upon the Northern league to be like a tree, of which [Tsar] Paul was the Trunk [sic] + Sweden + Denmark the Branches, If I can get at the Trunk and hew it down, the branches fall of course, but I may lop the branches + yet not be able to fell the tree.”

Another of Nelson’s political desires – the “hope that by the destruction of Buonaparte that wars with all nations will cease” – was just as difficult to achieve. After Nelson’s death at Trafalgar, Britain had to bear a strenuous war effort for nearly 10 more years before enjoying the Pax Britannica that reigned for much of the 19th century.



In James Gillray’s cartoon *The Plumb-Pudding in Danger*, British prime minister William Pitt the Younger (left) and Napoleon Bonaparte divide up the globe. Pitt played a key role in galvanising Britain’s war effort against the French, and Nelson appears to have greatly admired him

WAR

“My dearest friend, now we are sure of fighting. I am sent for”

Nelson wrote the above words to Emma on 23 March 1801, less than 10 days before the battle of Copenhagen, a critical clash in the War of the Second Coalition, which saw Britain scrambling to prevent the powerful Danish fleet allying with the Russian and Swedish fleets in support of the French.

By the time of the battle, Nelson had gained the reputation of an audacious risk-taker – the kind of admiral who’d always favour aggression over caution – thanks to his spectacular victory over the French at the battle of the Nile in 1798. But, by 1800, his affair with Emma had become so notorious that the Admiralty did not judge Nelson fit for anything *but* fighting. As such, he had not been entrusted with the command of a fleet, but rather placed under a senior admiral, Sir Hyde Parker, who began negotiations with the Danes before entering the Baltic.

Nelson’s letters to Emma from this time bear testimony to his impatience to advance into the Baltic and his desire to frighten the Danes into siding with Britain. By contrast, Sir Hyde hesitated until the ice started melting in the Baltic,

enabling the Russian and Swedish fleets to join their Danish ally. Pressed for action, Hyde sent Nelson to fight at Copenhagen.

As the battle ran its course, it sounded and looked so dreadful from a distance that Sir Hyde signalled retreat, which Nelson ignored. Famously putting the telescope to his blind eye, he declared: “I really do not see the signal.” Notwithstanding this determination to go on the attack, Nelson started negotiating with the “Danes, the brothers of Englishmen”, rather than fighting to the bitter end.

When he learned that this act of mercy was being criticised back home, he justified his actions to Emma: “The cause that I felt... [was] humanity ... when my flag of truce went on shore, the crown batteries, and the batteries on Amack and in the dock yard were firing at us, one half their shot necessarily striking the [Danish] ships who had surrendered and our fire did the same and worse... + it was a massacre, this caused my note... I felt when the Danes became my prisoners, I became their protector.”



James Gillray's less than flattering depiction of a pregnant Emma bemoaning Nelson's departure to the Baltic. The couple's relationship drew stinging ridicule from the British press



A contemporary engraving of the battle of Copenhagen. Although Nelson was a naturally aggressive tactician, he had no wish to inflict unnecessary suffering on his defeated Danish opponents



A needlework picture (reportedly worked by Emma herself) of Emma and Nelson at Merton Place in Surrey, where the couple lived with Sir William Hamilton

THE PAST AND FUTURE

“None of the great shall enter our peaceful abode, I hate them all”

Of all the passages in Nelson’s letters to Emma, perhaps the most poignant are those in which he imagines their future life together – a future that was dashed by his death at Trafalgar. The notoriety of the couple’s affair meant that, while Nelson was feted by the general public on returning to Britain, the reception he received from the establishment was often more restrained. Aware of his fragile social standing, in a letter from 1801 he wrote: “We will eat plain but will have good wine, good fires + a hearty welcome for our friends, but none of the great shall enter our peaceful abode, I hate them all”.

Nelson’s letters also provided him with a platform from which he could reminisce about the past and pay his respects to those most responsible for his life’s achievements. On 11 June 1801, he observed: “This day 22 years I was made a Post Captain by Sir Peter Parker, as good a man as ever lived if you meet him again say that I shall drink his health in a bumper this day for I do not forget that I owe my present exalted rank to his partiality, although I feel if I had even been in an humbler sphere that Nelson would have been Nelson still.” **H**

Dr Marianne Czisnik is a historian and lawyer who has published widely on Admiral Nelson. She is editor of *Nelson’s Letters to Lady Hamilton*, a compilation of 400 letters penned by the naval hero to his lover, which was published by the Navy Record Society in July 2020

FAME

“The beautiful Emma, rowing a one armed admiral in a boat, It will certainly be caricatured”

The image of Lady Hamilton rowing her naval hero to shore was never directly caricatured – as Nelson imagines it might be, in his words above – but it easily could have been. As a highly visible public figure, fame was something that he had to grapple with during his career, and he was conscious of how he and Emma appeared to the public. On their joint return from the Mediterranean in November 1800, in the company of Lady Hamilton’s husband, the couple had been subject to quite outspoken ridicule, fanned by a voracious press. Being portrayed in

caricature, however, was regarded at the time as a marker of status.

But Nelson did not always enjoy the spotlight. At times he was plagued by his celebrity, as in August 1801, when, as he tells Emma, he was in English waters, protecting Britain from a potential French invasion. “I have given directions to captain Gore (or rather requested) not to let any body come into the ship but who had business with me... Fifty boats are rowing, I am told, about her this moment to have a look at the one armed man.”

BOOKS OF THE YEAR 2020





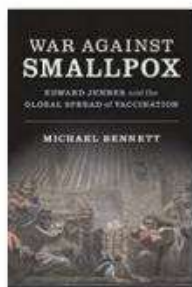
In this strange and unsettling year, reading has offered escapism, understanding and an absorbing way to while away the hours in isolation. From fast-paced spy thrillers and moving family sagas to dramatic reimaginings of historical epochs, we asked historians to tell us which new history books they have enjoyed the most in 2020

COMPILED BY **ELLIE CAWTHORNE**

ILLUSTRATION BY **EVONNE SUMMERS**



Gareth Williams



Two books that resonated with me this year cover different eras in the 200-year campaign to defeat smallpox, one of humanity's greatest scourges. Michael Bennett's *War Against Smallpox* (CUP) explains how

vaccination conquered the world in the quarter-century after Edward Jenner introduced it in the 1790s. It's an incredible journey, with walk-on parts for Napoleon, Jefferson and the tsar of Russia.



Gavin Weightman's *The Great Inoculator* (Yale) looks at variolation, the bizarre 18th-century precursor of vaccination. Patients were deliberately infected with smallpox (not the harmless cowpox

used in vaccination), hoping to confer protection against future attacks. Amazingly, it worked, notably in the hands of Daniel Sutton, a non-medical entrepreneur, who marketed his secret method as "safe, quick and pleasant" and apparently variolated more than 10,000 people without a single death from smallpox. He built up a huge franchise but later lost out to plagiarists and ultimately vaccination. His story isn't "untold", but Weightman relates it with clarity and verve.



For my last choice I want to jump to 1949 when, without warning, the USSR exploded an atomic bomb. Behind the leaking of atomic secrets to the Soviets was Ursula Kuczynski, a pro-communist German Jew known to her

English neighbours as "Mrs Burton" and as "Sonya" to her Red Army bosses. As related by Ben Macintyre in *Agent Sonya* (Viking), her espionage career took her to China, Poland, Germany and England.

The cover blurb claims her story "has never been told". In fact, a translation of Kuczynski's autobiography appeared in 1991, but, as expected, Macintyre makes this a riveting and thought-provoking read.

Gareth Williams' most recent book is *Unravelling the Double Helix: The Lost Heroes of DNA* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2019)



Artistic exemplars A late 12th-century mosaic from Sicily's Monreale Cathedral. Diana Darke reveals the Islamic influences on medieval European architecture in this year's *Stealing from the Saracens*

Double life

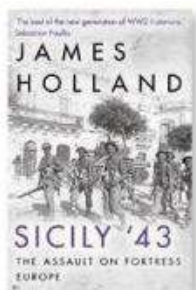
A "riveting and thought-provoking" biography written by Ben Macintyre this year charts the life and career of the Soviet spy 'Agent Sonya', AKA Ursula Kuczynski



BRIDGEMAN/COURTESY OF PETER BEURTON

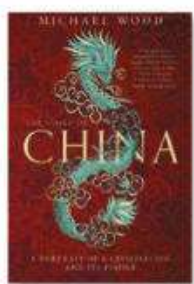


Tom Holland



I hope I will not be accused of undue nepotism when I nominate my brother James Holland's *Sicily '43* (Bantam) as a revelatory read. The latest in a series of books that trace campaigns of the Second World War,

it combines the experience of men (and occasionally women) on the ground with a searching analysis of the tactical and strategic layers of an operation that, in this brilliantly detailed study, is redeemed from the enormous condescension of posterity.



I also hugely enjoyed Michael Wood's *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster), a book that is learned, lyrical and astonishingly comprehensive in its scope. It was exactly the single volume history of

this brilliant and remarkable civilisation that I had always dreamed of finding.



The art of fusing scholarship with readability is similarly evident in Paul Cartledge's history of *Thebes* (Picador), a city that has always been the ugly duckling of ancient Greek history. The great value of this book is that it

enables us to see the Thebans not through the eyes of their enemies, but as they themselves would have wished to be seen.

Finally – a slight cheat – I would like to recommend the Patreon account of the brilliant scholar of Old English, Eleanor Parker, whose blog and tweets have long been a source of particular delight to me. Subscribers to her *Journey Through the Anglo-Saxon Year* account receive regular and seasonally appropriate posts on the rhythms of the Anglo-Saxon calendar: full moons, feast days, the cycles of sowing and reaping. In this strange and fractured year, I have found Parker's posts a source of comfort and – dare I use the word? – joy. I only hope that some enterprising editor has subscribed to her account and will commission her to transcribe it into a book.

Tom Holland's latest book is *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (Little, Brown, 2019)



Priya Atwal



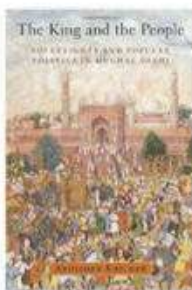
Grounded at home during the 'Great Lockdown of 2020', the summer and autumn months brought with them a surprising gift: the opportunity to read and reflect deeply, thanks to some particularly

wonderful historical writing. Travelling abroad was not an option while I was living with vulnerable family members, but Diana Darke's *Stealing from the Saracens* (Hurst) transported me to some of the grandest architectural sites of Europe. It vividly reveals how many of the continent's most iconic Christian buildings are deeply inspired by medieval Islamic, 'Saracenic' influences. Darke's message that "no society exists in isolation, and everything is connected" feels all the more moving as we live through a global pandemic.



But what connects us all more than the stars in the sky? Jo Marchant's fascinating book, *The Human Cosmos: A Secret History of the Stars* (Canongate), is a "long history of knowledge that

people have gleaned from the stars", as well as a "glimpse into the mental universe of our ancestors". A beautifully written blend of scientific and historical scholarship, it also makes a passionate case for why we need to peel our eyes away from our smartphones and look up to the skies more often, to recover a connection with our ancestors and restore our collective wellbeing.



Last, but not least, I was deeply impressed by Abhishek Kaicker's *The King and the People: Sovereignty and Popular Politics in Mughal Delhi* (OUP). In this delightful, highly readable book,

Kaicker offers up a pioneering study of popular politics during Mughal rule. You'll be amazed at how much shoemakers and coffee contributed to the making of sovereignty in early modern India!

Priya Atwal is the author of *Royals and Rebels: The Rise and Fall of the Sikh Empire* (Hurst, 2020)

LOOKING FORWARD

Books editor **Ellie Cawthorne** takes a look at the history titles coming up in 2021

The world of book publishing wasn't immune to the turbulence of 2020. But while there have been postponements and cancellations aplenty – with publication dates jumping around like awkward party guests in a game of musical chairs – this year has still offered up some real gems. Having witnessed 2020's scheduling mayhem, it feels foolish to make any kind of predictions about what next year might hold. But that being said, let's take a look at what 2021 hopefully has in store.

As always, history books will offer us a chance to reflect on our current situation, and I'll be kicking off the year by speaking to Robert Tombs about the long historical backdrop to Brexit, which he explores in *This Sovereign Isle* (Allen Lane). We'll see more in-depth discussions of debates that caught fire in 2020 in Sathnam Sanghera's *Empireland* (Viking) and Kehinde Andrews' *The New Age of Empire* (Allen Lane), which will both interrogate the lasting impact of colonialism. And for those who feel ready to apply an analytical eye to this year's apocalyptic undercurrents, Niall Ferguson will be delving into the 'politics of catastrophe' in the ominously titled *Doom* (Allen Lane).

If you're after escapism rather than self-analysis, there will be plenty on offer. Looking back to a more distant past, Katherine Pagonis will be highlighting royal women of the medieval Middle East in *Queens of Jerusalem* (W&N), while Max Adams' *The First Kingdom* (Apollo) will untangle fact from fiction in the story of Britain in the 'age of Arthur'.

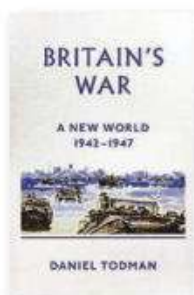
Other upcoming highlights include Linda Colley's *The Gun, the Ship and the Pen* (Profile), which will trace the impact – for both good and ill – of the rise of written constitutions on world history. Meanwhile, Shrabani Basu's *The Mystery of the Parsee Lawyer* (Bloomsbury) looks at what a bizarre legal case involving Arthur Conan Doyle and mutilated horses can reveal about attitudes to race and imperialism in early 20th-century Britain.

Finally, as an admirer of Fiona Sampson's previous work, I'm very much looking forward to reading her take on Victorian poet and activist Elizabeth Barrett Browning in *Two-Way Mirror* (Profile).



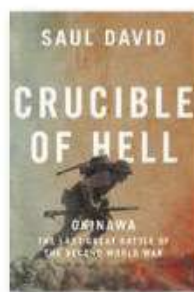


Keith Lowe



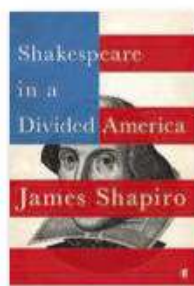
As ever, scores of books about the Second World War were published this year. For me, the pick of the bunch was Daniel Todman's *Britain's War: A New World 1942-1947* (Allen Lane) – the second

volume in his magisterial history of Britain during this most pivotal moment in 20th-century history. Todman covers the military events in detail, but he also deals with the social and economic costs of the war, the huge shifts in party politics, changes in religious thinking, class consciousness, attitudes towards empire, women's rights and much more. Virtually no aspect of British life is left untouched.



Focusing on the other side of the world is Saul David's brilliant *Crucible of Hell* (William Collins), a harrowing account of the battle of Okinawa in 1945. The attention to detail in this book is exemplary: we

see the conflict from just about every angle – Japanese as well as American – drawn from eyewitness accounts and declassified documents. Okinawa is a battle too often neglected in western narratives of the war despite being, in David's account, directly responsible for Truman's decision to use the atom bomb later that summer.



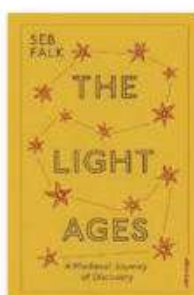
Putting aside the Second World War, one of my other favourite books this year was James Shapiro's *Shakespeare in a Divided America* (Faber & Faber). In seven self-contained essays, Shapiro describes

the issues that have repeatedly torn the United States apart over the past 200 years – using Shakespeare as his lens. It sounds contrived, but if you want to understand some of the deeper, historical issues behind this year's car-crash of an election, Shapiro's book is an excellent place to start.

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Keith Lowe's most recent book is *Prisoners of History: What Monuments to the Second World War Tell Us About Our History and Ourselves* (HarperCollins, 2020)

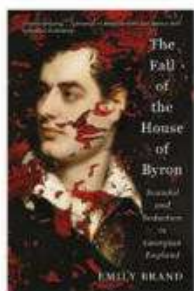


Suzannah Lipscomb



Firstly, I'd nominate Seb Falk's book, *The Light Ages* (Allen Lane). It's stunning: both exquisitely written and so very clever. By following the life of one little-known monk, John of Westwyk, Falk opens up

for us the sophisticated and utterly different ways in which people in the Middle Ages thought and makes us question our assumptions about the medieval past.



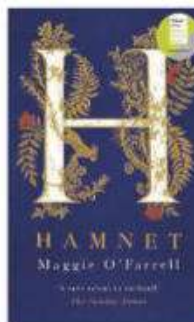
Equally outstanding in sheer quality of prose and scrupulosity of research is Emily Brand's *The Fall of the House of Byron* (John Murray). This gripping tale of scandal through three generations

of the Byron family will finally put pay to any idea that the Georgians were boring. Instead, we're given a tale of murder, seduction, incest, elopement and shipwreck, all centred around the crumbling Newstead Abbey: just gorgeous.



Family history is also at the centre of investigative journalist Svenja O'Donnell's *Inge's War* (Ebury). Part history and part memoir, this engrossing and moving read exposes the secret

shame and suffering of those on the wrong side of history and, in so doing, unearths a vitally important story from the Second World War. Its revelations and thought-provoking reflections have stayed with me.



Finally, though, it's historical fiction, I must mention Maggie O'Farrell's wonderful *Hamnet* (Tinder Press), which superbly evokes the 16th century as she recreates the family life of Shakespeare and the death

of his only son. It may make you cry, but you will not be able to put it down.

.....
Suzannah Lipscomb is the author of *The Voices of Nîmes: Women, Sex and Marriage in Reformation Languedoc* (OUP, 2019)



Battle rages The aircraft carrier USS *Bunker Hill* under fire at Okinawa, a pivotal WW2 battle that Saul David argues led to the dropping of the atom bomb



GETTY IMAGES

Written in the stars

Seb Falk highlights the sophistication and inventiveness of medieval scientific thinking – as seen in objects like this brass astrolabe – in *The Light Ages*

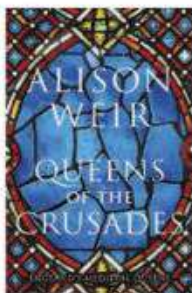


Family values

Emily Brand uncovers “murder, seduction, incest, elopement and shipwreck” in the story of Lord Byron (pictured here in 1813) and his relatives



Tracy Borman



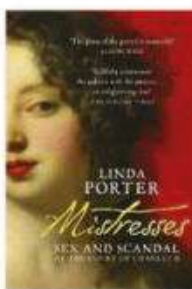
The book that I most anticipated this year was Alison Weir’s *Queens of the Crusades: Eleanor of Aquitaine and her Successors* (Jonathan Cape). The second instalment of her *England’s*

Medieval Queens series, it tells the story of five “towering female figures” of the Middle Ages who broke the mould of the dutiful queen consort. They were crusaders, rebels, seductresses and intellectuals – forces to be reckoned with in their own right. Told with all of Weir’s characteristic verve and exceptional eye for detail, this book should find its way into every history lover’s Christmas stocking.



And from royal rebels to royal fashion. Dress expert Eleri Lynn’s lavishly illustrated volume *Tudor Textiles* (Yale) shines a light on the dazzling beauty and extravagance of court

fashion and décor. In raiding the sumptuous Tudor royal wardrobe, Lynn has uncovered some real gems: from Henry VIII’s tapestries which were worth more than the crown jewels, to the recently discovered dress thought to have belonged to Elizabeth I – the only one of her 1,900-strong dress collection to survive.



Royal adornments of a rather different kind are brought to life in Linda Porter’s *Mistresses: Sex and Scandal at the Court of Charles II* (Picador). The sexual exploits of the “Merrie Monarch”

provided ample fodder for diarists such as Samuel Pepys, but they are not the main focus here. Instead, Porter provides a set of impeccably researched pen portraits of the seven women who dominated the king’s life. Allowing the women to take centre stage for a change makes for an engaging and enlightening read.

.....
Tracy Borman’s latest book is the third instalment of her *King’s Witch* fiction series, *The Fallen Angel* (Hodder, 2020)

YOUR TOP 2020 READS

We asked which history books kept you entertained in lockdown and helped you get through a year like no other...

@cath_fletcher

Toby Green’s *A Fistful of Shells*, on west Africa, was a great introduction to a history I really wasn’t familiar with before.

@dmac571410

Herodotus, *The Histories*. Hard read but wow, didn’t they have some wild and crazy habits, practices and beliefs.

@ChrisColton3

The Brothers York by Thomas Penn. Some good insights of Edward IV, and the rise of the House of York, during the Wars of the Roses...

@DM_Vincenzo

Emperor: A New Life of Charles V by Geoffrey Parker. If you want to learn about the most powerful man in the first half of the 16th century, this book is your answer.

@rowanhoffy

Working my way through [William Dalrymple’s] *The Anarchy*. Very eye-opening on a time period less familiar to me.

@paulh66runs

Really enjoyed Dan Jones’ *The Templars*, a fascinating and very well-told story.

@AgroBioDiverse

Islamic Empires by Justin Marozzi. A useful corrective to prejudice and Orientalist nonsense. And a hugely enjoyable, immersive read.

@brphistory

Just when you think that everything about Winston Churchill that could be written may have already been written, along comes Allen Packwood and his splendid volume, *How Churchill Waged War*

@CAPhillips31

Beneath a Scarlet Sky [by Mark Sullivan] was a great story of the resistance in Italy during WW2. *The Nightingale* [by Kristin Hannah] was also very good, a story [about] two sisters in the French Resistance. Both [are] being turned into movies I believe.

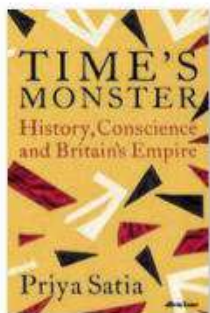


Yasmin Khan



A brilliant book from this year that is full of surprising stories is Priya Atwal's *Royals and Rebels: The Rise and Fall of the Sikh Empire* (Hurst). Atwal has managed to craft a very fresh and page-turning

history of the origins and demise of the Sikh kingdom, which gives a lot more attention to the role of Ranjit Singh's wives and children than many previous accounts of his life. In particular the story of Jind Kaur, the young regent and mother of Prince Duleep Singh, and her struggle to maintain his crown in the face of British imperial power, is very moving. These were tough and ingenious Punjabi women.



My second nomination, Priya Satia's *Time's Monster: History, Conscience and British Empire* (Allen Lane), turns the lens on history as a subject, asking how we have told the story of empire in the past. The

author offers a scholarly and analytical interpretation of how historians themselves have framed the ways that empire is understood in British history writing – from John Stuart Mill to EP Thompson.



And to the present day: David Olusoga is the best possible person to write *Black and British: A Short, Essential History* (Pan Macmillan). This new, updated edition of his 2016 book is aimed at younger readers, and it

appears at a time when many people are debating the best ways to tell histories of empire and race in the classroom. Olusoga describes it as “the book I wish I had been given to read when I was at school”, and I couldn't agree more.

.....
Yasmin Khan teaches at the University of Oxford. She has recently been presenting *Britain's Biggest Dig* on BBC Two alongside Alice Roberts

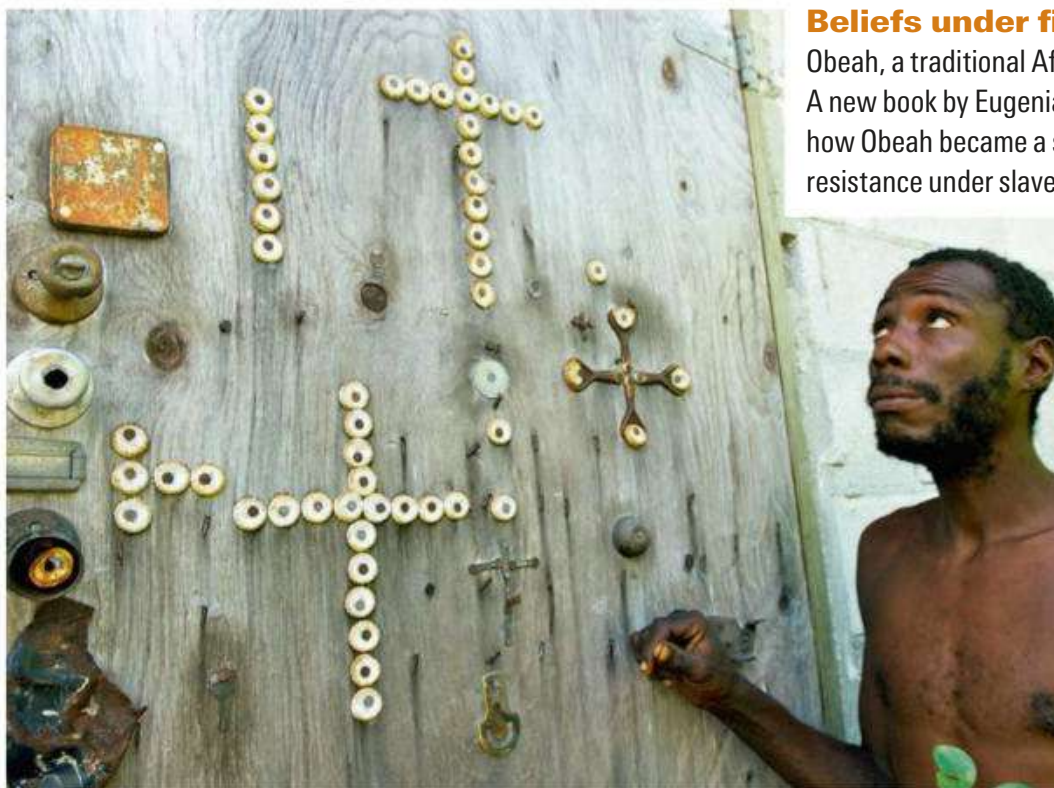


Hidden histories Brixton children celebrate a royal visit in 1938. A new edition of David Olusoga's *Black and British*, aimed at younger readers, reveals lesser-known stories of black Britons from the Roman era onwards



Era of unrest

Kim Ghattas's *Black Wave* explores the role of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 in the unravelling of the Middle East



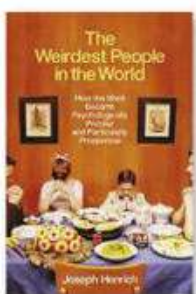
Beliefs under fire A man practises Obeah, a traditional African belief system. A new book by Eugenia O'Neal charts how Obeah became a source of resistance under slavery



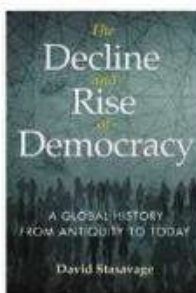
Simon Sebag Montefiore



One of my favourite books from 2020 was ***Hitler: Downfall 1939-1945*** (Bodley Head). Volker Ullrich's superb and supreme new biography, while complementing other classic biographies of the dictator, is also fresh, up-to-date, shrewd and beautifully written. I think it's the best biography of Hitler written so far.



I also really enjoyed the intriguing idea behind ***The Weirdest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous*** (Allen Lane) by Joseph Henrich. He argues that "Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic" people are atypical, because the west was formed by exceptional processes that helped Europe dominate the world post 1750. The result is a brilliant performance – accessible, playful and scholarly, turning conventional history on its head and approaching it in a new way.



In fact, it would make a perfect companion piece for David Stasavage's readable, intriguing and academic ***The Decline and Rise of Democracy: A Global History from Antiquity to Today*** (Princeton) – an outstanding volume that analyses the development of democracy and autocracy in a refreshing and relevant way.



Lastly, I loved Kim Ghattas's colourful, grim and gripping ***Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Rivalry That Unravelling the Middle East*** (Wildfire), which uses the Iranian Revolution and other events of 1979 to show how the Middle East turned towards extremism and intolerance.

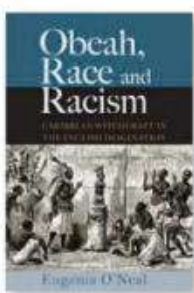
Simon Sebag Montefiore's latest book is *Voices of History: Speeches That Changed the World* (W&N, 2019)



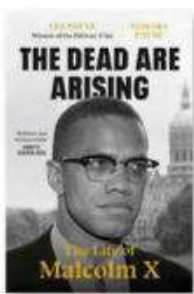
Kehinde Andrews



Transatlantic slavery is one of the most misunderstood and misrepresented periods of history. Stella Dadzie offers a much-needed corrective by centring on the experiences of black women forced into the plantation system in ***A Kick in the Belly: Women, Slavery and Resistance*** (Verso). The horrors of enslavement, its impact on Africa, Britain's central role, and most importantly, the fierce resistance both on the African continent and in the Americas are all evocatively drawn out. Contrary to popular narratives, black women were active agents in this history.



In order to enslave Africans, many slave-owners tried to violently erase all connections between the enslaved and the African continent. In ***Obeah, Race and Racism: Caribbean Witchcraft in the English Imagination*** (University of the West Indies Press), Eugenia O'Neal explores how traditional African beliefs were maintained and became a key source of resistance. O'Neal also examines how these beliefs were ridiculed, becoming proof of African inferiority, which still echoes into the present day.



Malcolm X is one of the most talked about and misrepresented figures of the 20th century. In ***The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X*** (Viking), Les and Tamara Payne offer a detailed portrait of Malcolm's family, life and politics that makes clear how much his voice is needed today. The book also provides a detailed history lesson of the America that produced Malcolm, from the rise of the Ku Klux Klan to the importance of the Garvey movement, and the complicity of the state machinery in maintaining an unjust social order.

Kehinde Andrews is professor of black studies at Birmingham City University. His books include *Back to Black: Retelling Black Radicalism for the 21st Century* (Bloomsbury, 2018)

BESTSELLERS

Waterstones' 10 top selling history books of this year so far

Agent Sonya: Lover, Mother, Soldier, Spy

by Ben MacIntyre (Viking)

The Ratline: Love, Lies and Justice on the Trail of a Nazi Fugitive

by Philippe Sands (Weidenfeld & Nicolson)

The Crew: The Story of a Lancaster Bomber Crew

by David Price (Head of Zeus)

Sicily '43: The First Assault on Fortress Europe

by James Holland (Bantam Press)

Behind the Enigma

by John Ferris (Bloomsbury)

Dresden: The Fire and the Darkness

by Sinclair McKay (Viking)

Lancaster: The Forging of a Very British Legend

by John Nichol (Simon & Schuster)

Last Stop Auschwitz: My Story of Survival From Within the Camp

by Eddy de Wind (Doubleday)

Square Haunting: Five Women, Freedom and London Between the Wars

by Francesca Wade (Faber & Faber)

British Summer Time Begins: The School Summer Holidays 1930-1980

by Ysenda Maxtone Graham (Little, Brown)

Accurate at time of printing

John Nichol's *Lancaster* is one of 2020's bestsellers, in a list dominated by the Second World War



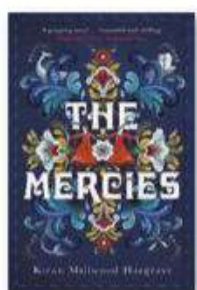


Nick Rennison selects this year's best historical fiction



Few historical novels this year were as boldly imaginative and colourful as Stuart Turton's *The Devil and the Dark Water* (Raven). In the 1630s, a ship leaves Batavia in the Dutch East Indies for Amsterdam.

On board is an East Indies Company bigwig and his entourage. Murder, mystery and possibly supernatural phenomena plague crew and passengers alike. As the ship sails into increasingly troubled waters, Turton's plot grows ever more extravagant and bizarre, but his grip on his readers' attention never slackens.



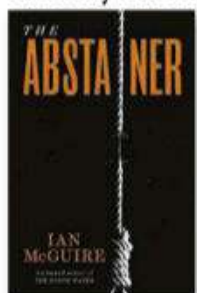
Set in the same century, but worlds away from Turton's baroque adventure, Kiran Millwood Hargrave's debut novel for adults, *The Mercies* (Picador), charts the experiences of women from

a remote Norwegian island, who have lost their menfolk during a terrible storm, following the arrival of a witch-hunting new magistrate. Hargrave's heroine, Maren, forms a bond with the magistrate's oppressed young wife as he doubles down on his increasingly violent persecutions in an unusual, memorable tale.



Kate Grenville's intelligent, insightful novel, *A Room Made of Leaves* (Canongate), also features a woman obliged to cope with the inflexible pride and paranoia of her husband. In the recently

established penal colony of New South Wales, Elizabeth Macarthur struggles with the demands of an unhappy marriage and slowly discovers her true self amid the initially alien landscapes of a new world.



Grenville's character is based on a real-life pioneer of white Australia, and Ian McGuire's *The Absta Ner* (Scribner) similarly has a plot inspired by genuine historical events. It is set largely in Manchester in the



All at sea "Murder, mystery and possibly supernatural phenomena" plague the passengers of a 17th-century Dutch ship (much like the *Gouda*, seen here on a journey to Batavia) in Stuart Turton's *The Devil and the Dark Water*

1860s, after three Irishmen, Fenians committed to the struggle to free Ireland from English rule, have been hanged. World-weary policeman James O'Connor and Irish-American assassin Stephen Doyle, who is intent on revenge for the hangings, stalk one another through the city's streets and beyond in a gripping story of violence, obsession and the urge for retribution.

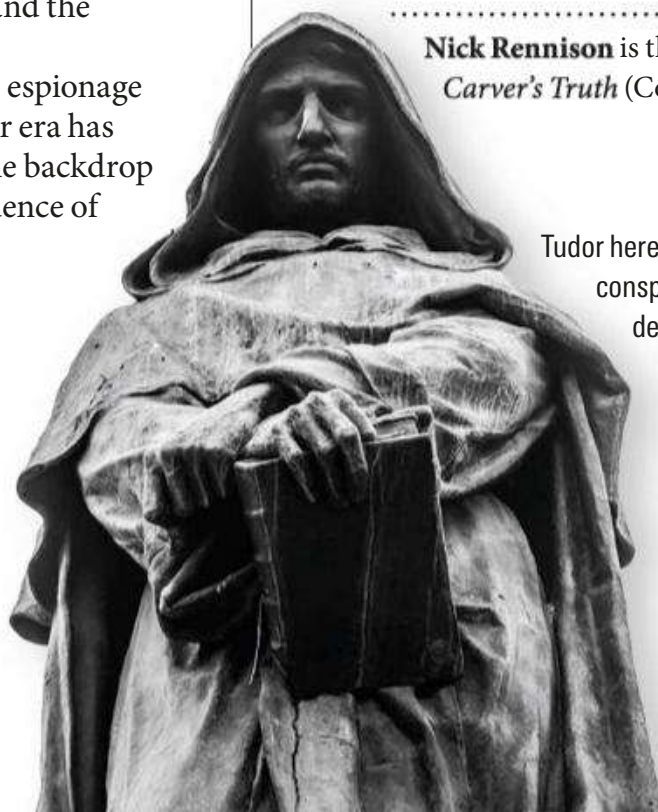


Meanwhile, espionage in the Tudor era has provided the backdrop for the sequence of enjoyable historical thrillers by SJ Parris,

who has turned Giordano Bruno, the 16th-century heretic and philosopher, into an engaging hero. *Execution* (HarperCollins), the latest in the series, sees Bruno once more in the

employ of Elizabeth I's spymaster, Sir Francis Walsingham, and playing a dangerous game as an undercover agent amid conspirators plotting to assassinate the English queen. Parris combines vivid details of Elizabethan life with an ability to create intriguing characters and sustain a thoroughly entertaining narrative. **H**

Nick Rennison is the author of *Carver's Truth* (Corvus, 2016)



Tudor heretics and conspirators play a deadly game of cat and mouse in SJ Parris's *Execution*

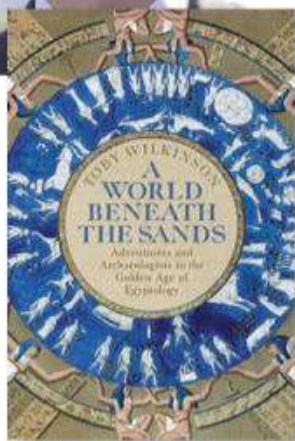
Look out for our virtual lecture series

BBC
HISTORY
MAGAZINE **LIVE**

We are hosting a programme of virtual events this autumn and winter, online and available globally. Wherever you are, tune in to see one of our renowned historians talking about their new book. Each lecture lasts 45 minutes and is followed by a 15-minute Q&A session. You'll also have the opportunity to pre-order a signed copy of the book via independent bookseller Fox Lane Books.



Toby Wilkinson **A World Beneath the Sands:** **The Rediscovery of Ancient Egypt**

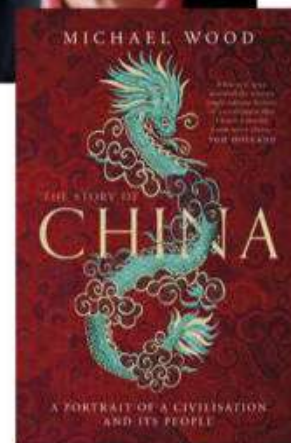


Meet the men and women whose obsession with Egypt's ancient civilisation drove them to uncover its secrets. Their work helped to enrich and transform our understanding of the Nile valley and its people, and left a lasting impression on Egypt, too.

Thursday 10 December 2020, 7pm



Michael Wood **The Story of China:** **A Portrait of a Civilisation and its People**



Michael Wood shares stories from his highly praised new book, a grand sweep of the history of the world's oldest continuous civilisation: "A tale of astounding drama, fabulous creativity and deep humanity."

Tuesday 22 December 2020, 7pm



Mary-Ann Ochota **Secret Britain:** **Unearthing the Nation's Most Mysterious Archaeology**

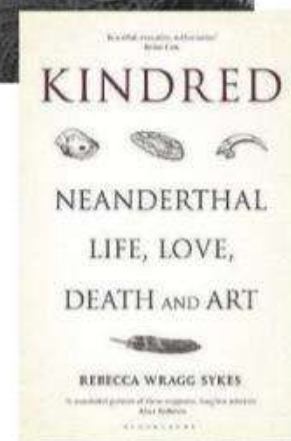


Mary-Ann explores the research that has helped us understand so much about Britain's earliest inhabitants. Her talk takes us on a tour of the nation's prehistoric treasures – from mummies found at a house in the Outer Hebrides, to a burial chamber where midsummer sunrise has been observed since 6000 BC.

Thursday 14 January 2021, 7pm



Rebecca Wragg Sykes **Kindred:** **Neanderthal Life, Love, Death and Art**



Talk details still to be confirmed.

Thursday 28 January 2021, 7pm

Tickets cost £10. Book now at historyextra.com/events/virtual-lecture



WATCH

Forbidden love

Starring Deborah Kerr and overseen by the writing-directing team of Emeric Pressburger and Michael Powell, the previous screen adaptation of *Black Narcissus* (1947) is a classic of British cinema. So it takes a brave creative team to engage with Rumer Godden's 20th-century gothic study of sexual and emotional repression.

Step forward scriptwriter Amanda Coe, whose 2019 drama *The Trial Of Christine Keeler* explored the Profumo affair, and cinematographer Charlotte Bruus Christensen, who is taking on directing duties. Set in the 1930s, the duo's three-part adaptation stars Gemma Arterton as Sister Clodagh of St Faiths, an order making a new home in a remote palace in Nepal. Here, Clodagh is attracted to a handsome yet damaged land agent, Mr Dean (Alessandro Nivola), and the ghosts of her own past become entangled with a tragic history.

Black Narcissus

BBC One / Expected to air in December

ENCOUNTERS

82 DIARY: LISTEN / WATCH / TASTE

By Jonathan Wright, Samantha Nott and Matt Elton

88 EXPLORE... Cragside, Northumberland



Second to nun

Mr Dean (Alessandro Nivola, shown here far left) causes a stir among the sisters of St Faiths in a new three-part adaptation of *Black Narcissus*

WATCH

To kill a queen

On 19 May 1536, Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's second wife and the mother of Elizabeth I, was beheaded by sword at the Tower of London. In a trial largely orchestrated by her husband's devious fixer, Thomas Cromwell, she had faced charges of adultery, incest and treason. But how did such a powerful woman fall so completely and catastrophically from favour?

In a new three-part series, historian Tracy Borman (right), joint chief curator of Historic Royal Palaces, tells the story of Boleyn's final days. It begins with the queen's arrest, which came to Anne as a complete surprise. Subsequent episodes deal with Anne's trial, which even by the standards of the Tudor era was shockingly stacked in favour of the prosecution, and her death.



The Fall of Anne Boleyn

Channel 5 / Weeknights from Tuesday 1 December



Alice Roberts (pictured in Lincoln) delves into the colourful pasts of Britain's historic towns and cities, from Plymouth to Glasgow

WATCH

Urban stories

Professor Alice Roberts' series exploring British history through stories centred on different towns and cities continues through late November and December. In Plymouth, Roberts focuses on the Elizabethan era, when the city became associated with the derring-do of Sir Francis Drake. But, we're reminded, the man who had a key role in vanquishing the Spanish Armada was also both a slaver and a pirate.

Look out too for episodes on Glasgow during the age of steam, which began in the late

18th century, and Georgian Edinburgh. The final show in the series deals with Manchester during the industrial revolution, and in particular the experience of the new urban working class. Roberts looks over rarely seen documents that illuminate the human cost of the Peterloo massacre and sits at a desk used by Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx.

Britain's Most Historic Towns

Channel 4 and All 4 / Airing weekly on Saturdays and available to stream now



Kenyah Sandy stars as Kingsley in a drama highlighting the discriminatory practices of the UK education system in the 1970s

WATCH

Overcoming the odds

For those with Caribbean roots, London could be an unforgiving city in the years between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s. And yet, as a new anthology series from Steve McQueen (*Hunger*, *12 Years A Slave*) explores, this was also an era in which the capital's West Indian population established itself, often succeeding in the face of racism and discrimination.

The five dramas in the *Small Axe* season celebrate lives that may seem ordinary at first glance, and which illuminate themes still pertinent today. 'Education', for instance, focuses on schoolboy Kingsley (Kenyah Sandy), who is called to his headmaster's office for being disruptive in class. There, he learns he's to be sent to a 'special needs' school. Cue an intervention by a group of West Indian women who realise there's an unofficial segregation policy within the capital's education system.

'Alex Wheatle' tells the story of a writer who found his voice in the wake of the Brixton riots, while 'Red, White and Blue' focuses on Leroy Logan (John Boyega of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* fame), a copper who challenged racism in the Met from within.

Already on iPlayer are the romance 'Lovers Rock', and 'Mangrove', which charts the story of the Mangrove Nine, who were unjustly tried for inciting a riot following repeated police raids against a Notting Hill restaurant.

Small Axe

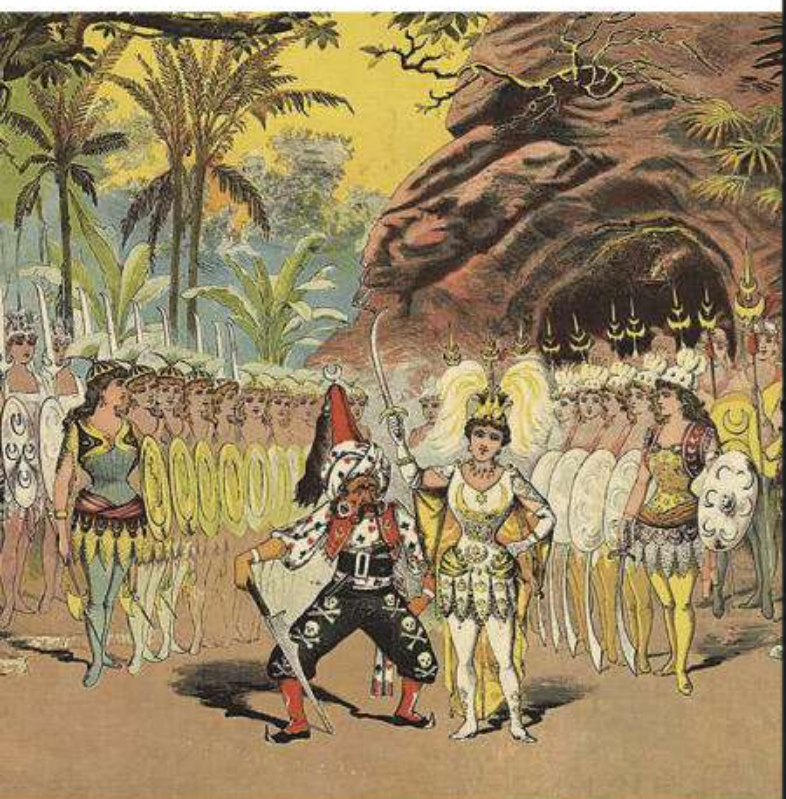
BBC One & BBC iPlayer / Airing weekly on Sundays and streaming

HISTORY ON THE AIRWAVES

“One of the unresolved dilemmas of the series is the distinction between a great life and a good life”



Great Lives, Radio 4's long-running biographical series that sees guests discuss historical figures, reached its 500th episode this autumn. Its host **MATTHEW PARRIS** looks back at some of his personal highlights



A 19th-century poster promoting a production of the pantomime *Aladdin and the Forty Thieves*

LISTEN

Festive entertainment

The pantomime season is usually when the whole family goes to the theatre together. Sadly, that hasn't been the case this year because of coronavirus, but a seasonal Archive On 4 documentary does at least provide some solace as it traces the history of the form.

The roots of pantomime, we learn, date back as far as ancient Rome. In terms of the British take on pantos, the Victorians had a huge influence (oh no they didn't, etc), which in turn has been paid forward into the comedy of *Monty Python*, *Blackadder* and the *Carry On* movies.

Also in the Archive On 4 strand, listen out for *Da Da Da DAAA!* (Saturday 12 December), billed as “a riotous and irreverent tour of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony”.

Archive On 4: It's Behind You! The Weird and Wonderful Story of British Pantomime

BBC Radio 4 / Boxing Day

WEEKLY TV & RADIO

Visit historyextra.com for weekly updates on upcoming TV and radio programmes

What are your thoughts on the show reaching this milestone?

I've hosted about three-quarters of them. The truth is they often go into one side of my head and out the other! My regret, so far, is how few men choose women as their great lives. Michael Howard chose Elizabeth I, [economics commentator] Paul Mason chose [French anarchist] Louise Michel and [actor] Daniel Rigby chose Victoria Wood, but honestly you could number the men who have chosen women on the fingers of one hand.

Does a choice ever blindside you?

Rarely, but I love it when it does. When, for instance, John Major chose Rudyard Kipling, that was fantastic. He had a passion for Rudyard Kipling, and we quickly found out he knew just as much as our expert witness did.

Historian Margaret MacMillan chose Benito Mussolini. That seemed an extraordinary choice.

It was very brave. We had a few complaints from listeners, and I did my best to answer them. She made it quite clear she wasn't an admirer of Mussolini, but she thought he was a very important figure, and a more interesting and a more nuanced figure than the slightly ridiculous Italian poseur whom we remember from the Second World War.

An unresolved, unresolvable dilemma [with the series] is the distinction between a great life and a good life. I use 'great' in the broadest sense of the term: anybody who made a huge impact on history, on science or literature, on the public imagination, on our culture. I would like someone to choose Pablo Escobar, the Colombian drugs baron, who had a fascinating life.

What are your thoughts on how much one person can change history?

There is a perennial, ongoing dispute

among historians and historiographers between Thomas Carlyle's 'Great Man Theory' and what you might call the Marxist view of history, which is that huge social and cultural forces sweep mankind along. On the whole, at least in this respect, I'm a bit of a Marxist. My life in politics and journalism has taught me that there is a direction in which the wind is blowing quite a lot of the time – and if it's blowing hard enough, there's absolutely no point in spitting into it. **H**

Great Lives returns to BBC Radio 4 on Tuesday 8 December. In the new series, novelist Philippa Gregory has chosen Katherine Parr, who married “a serial killer” (historian Suzannah Lipscomb features as the expert witness on this episode), and actor Diane Morgan (Philomena Cunk) reveals a personal connection to Air Chief Marshal Hugh Dowding. Also listen out for a *Great Lives* 'Greatest Hits' show at Christmas



French anarchist Louise Michel, seen here in 1871, was the pick of Paul Mason in 2013

HISTORY COOKBOOK



This festively warming drink is the perfect accompaniment to a yuletide night in

TASTE

Lambswool

“Next crown the bowl full / With gentle lamb’s wool / Add sugar, nutmeg, and ginger / With store of ale too / And thus ye must do / To make the wassail a swinger.” So goes a verse of 17th-century poet Robert Herrick’s *Twelfth Night*, a guide to ensuring that your yuletide bash leaves guests suitably merry. And, indeed, many of those ingredients are present and correct in this 21st-century variation on a centuries-old cocktail. Quite why this frothy apple concoction bears its name is lost in a historical haze, though one theory points to the froth’s resemblance to sheep’s fluffy coats.

In any case, this is the perfect warming drink for a dark and frosty winter’s night.

Difficulty: 2/10 **Time:** 50 minutes

INGREDIENTS

500g bramley or cox stewing apples (peeled and cored, about 300g net weight)
100ml water
100g sugar
One teaspoon of freshly grated nutmeg
1 tsp ginger powder
750ml of good ale

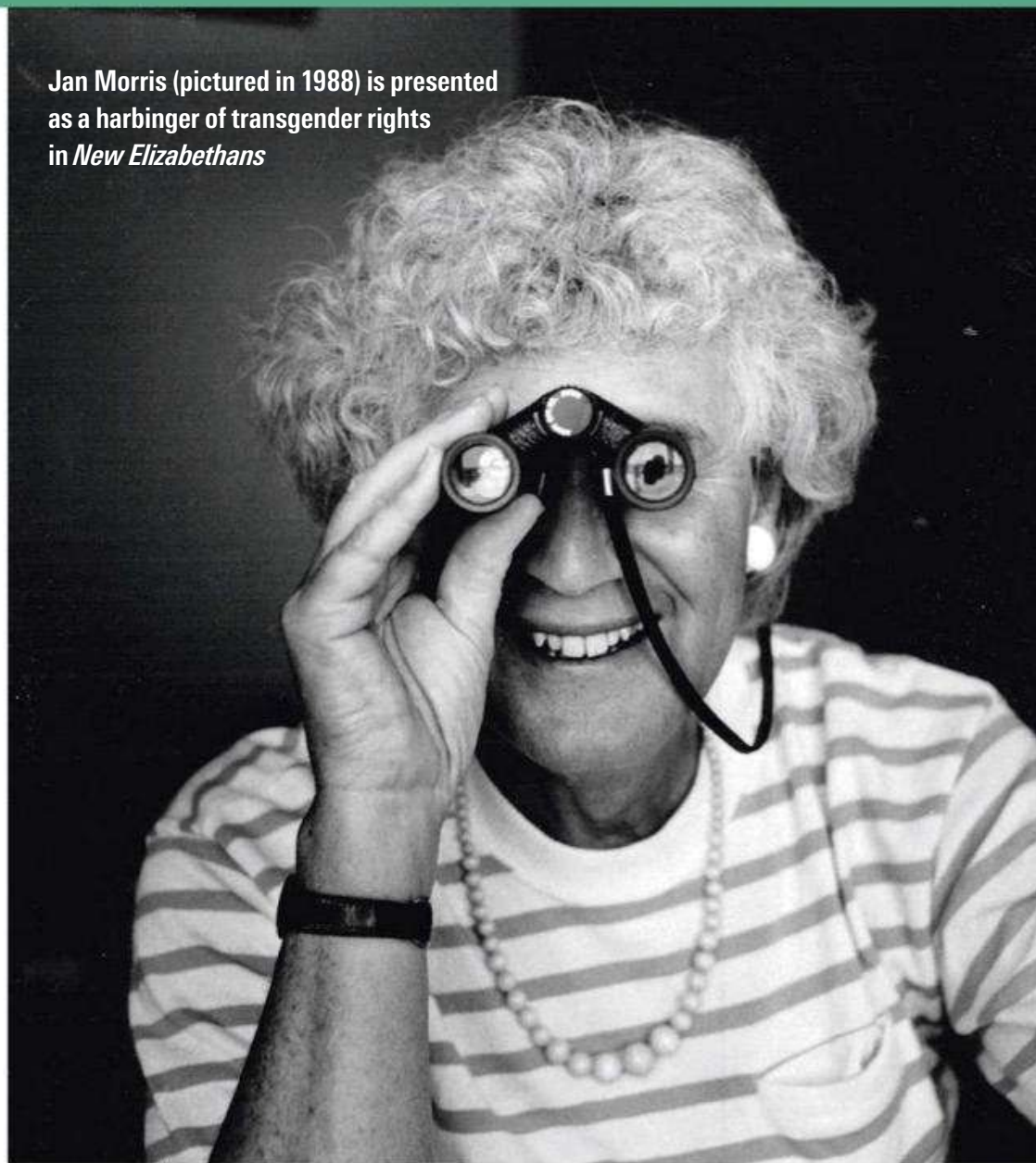
METHOD

Peel and cut your apples into small pieces and place them into a pot along with the water, sugar and spices. Stew until soft, and then puree until there are no bits remaining.

Once the mixture is ready to serve, heat up the apple puree and add the ale while whisking. You should get a nice froth while doing so. Serve at once.

Recipe from regulaysewijn.com

Jan Morris (pictured in 1988) is presented as a harbinger of transgender rights in *New Elizabethans*



WATCH

The way we are now

As a nation, how did we get to where we are? It’s a question that lies at the heart of a new series from Andrew Marr which, by focusing on key figures and their stories, charts the seismic changes in British society since Elizabeth II ascended the throne in 1952.

The first of three episodes, ‘Building a Better Society’, charts how a hierarchical and deferential country has become more socially liberal and inclusive. Jan Morris, the transgender writer, historian and former cavalry officer who reported on the 1953 conquest of Everest by Hillary and Tenzing when still living as a man, emerges as a harbinger of transgender rights. Marr also explores the story of reforming home secretary Roy Jenkins, who oversaw liberalising legislation in such areas as gay rights and divorce law.

‘A Brave New World’ turns the spotlight on post-colonial Britain – a country that has lost its territory and military might, but grown in importance as a cultural power. Those featured in the episode range from Earl Mountbatten of Burma to Live Aid activist Bob Geldof.

‘Made In Britain’, meanwhile, deals with the decline of Britain’s manufacturing heartlands. This, Marr argues, is not because of a lack of creativity, as the lives of inventors such as Christopher Cockerell and Clive Sinclair demonstrate.

New Elizabethans

BBC Two / December

➤ To read an **interview with Andrew Marr, the presenter of *New Elizabethans***, where he discusses his history hero, turn to page 98

LISTEN

Suspicious death

By enabling broadcasters to tell stories slowly, podcasts have changed narrative radio. For evidence, listen to the *Intrigue* strand on BBC Sounds, which has previously dealt with such subjects as the story of a senior Nazi and an escape tunnel under the Berlin Wall.

Intrigue's latest subject is, instead, rather more about the first draft of history. 'Mayday' deals with the life and death, following a fall from the balcony of his flat in Istanbul in November 2019, of James Le Mesurier, co-founder of Syrian civil defence force the White



Helmets. One of the themes of the documentary is how different groups in nations around the world have tried to control the narrative of the conflict in Syria – and it also tackles the question of whether Le Mesurier was a British spy.

Intrigue: Mayday

BBC Sounds / Available for streaming now, as are the earlier two series

WATCH

Social whirl

No *Downton Abbey* Christmas special? No problem. That's because Netflix is stepping into the glossy period-drama breach with a new series based on the romantic novels of Julia Quinn, set in the ballrooms and grand houses of Regency London.

Leading the ensemble cast as, respectively, debutante Daphne Bridgerton and Simon Basset, the Duke of Hastings (a committed bachelor), are Phoebe Dynevor and Regé-Jean Page. Can these two young people navigate a treacherous social scene that doubles as a marriage market used by families to gain power and influence?

Finally, listen out for Julie Andrews of *Sound of Music* fame as the show's narrator, Lady Whistledown, author of a high-society scandal sheet. **H**

Bridgerton

Netflix / Streaming from Christmas Day

Some of the cast of *Bridgerton*, including Phoebe Dynevor as debutante Daphne Bridgerton (front centre). The new Netflix drama is based on the novels by US author Julia Quinn



Wonder of its age

Nestled in the Northumbrian hills, Cragside looms large through the trees. **JULIAN HUMPHRYS** explores the extraordinary Victorian mansion and gardens which were masterminded by an equally extraordinary engineer

Take the road up on the moors above the Northumberland town of Alnwick, and you'll be driving across some of England's wildest, most barren countryside. But just before you reach the village of Rothbury, everything briefly changes. An extensive stretch of woodland opens up to reveal an attractive lake. Above it to the right, largely hidden from view by more trees, perches a large house. This is Cragside, the remarkable home of William Armstrong (1810–1900), one of the richest industrialists in Victorian Britain, and the first scientist to be raised to the peerage.

Armstrong had originally trained as a solicitor, but his true love had always been engineering. In 1847 he completed the move from law to industry, buying the land at Elswick in Newcastle that he would develop into the hub of a vast manufacturing empire. At its height Armstrong's company employed around 25,000 people, producing hydraulic cranes and machinery (including the mechanism that operates London's Tower Bridge), armaments and warships.

Although Armstrong initially had Cragside built in the 1860s as a modest holiday retreat, as he became richer, and a railway improved links with Newcastle, he decided to make it his main home. Between 1869 and 1884 he employed an up-and-coming architect, Richard Norman Shaw, to extend the house into the mansion we see today.

With its crenellated tower, half-timbered gables, tall chimney stacks, and large bay windows, the exterior of the resulting building is a rather bewildering mixture of styles. Its interior rooms, however, which feature stained-glass designs by Morris and Burne-Jones, are on a surprisingly homely scale. One glaring exception to this homeliness

is a monumental Italian marble chimney-piece in the upstairs drawing room. It was with some relief that I learned that this 10-tonne monster is supported by the bedrock of the hill behind the building.

Teeming with technology

Cragside is packed with evidence of Armstrong's passion for collecting: furniture, ceramics, artefacts of natural history and art – but for many visitors the real fascination of the house lies in the fact that Armstrong used his engineering skills to equip it with a remarkable array of what we would now call 'mod-cons'. Cragside was the first house in the world to be lit by hydroelectricity, and hydraulic machinery supplied the house with water, powered its lift and turned the spit in the kitchen. With central heating, an internal telephone system, and even Turkish baths in the basement, Cragside soon became a must-see for the great and the good: visitors included the Prince and Princess of Wales, who went to the property in 1884.

Armstrong's energy and ingenuity were not restricted to the house, however. He and his wife, Margaret, oversaw the planting of a staggering 7 million trees on their estate, including a pinetum which today boasts Britain's tallest Scots pine, being 40 metres in height. They introduced alpine and shrubs from all over the world; laid out an Italian terrace where visitors can still sit and take in the wildness beyond it; and created a vast rock garden which leads down into the valley below the house. This rock garden is almost entirely man-made: its sandstone boulders were brought in from the surrounding moors and manoeuvred into place by an army of workmen. In short, as well as creating a house that was a marvel of its age, the Armstrongs transformed the bare hillsides of the Cragside estate into one of the great gardens of Victorian England. **H**

// Cragside was packed with mod-cons – it was the first house in the world to be lit by hydroelectricity //

Julian Humphrys is a historian and development officer of the Battlefields Trust

VISIT For more information on Cragside, go to nationaltrust.org.uk/cragside



ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES



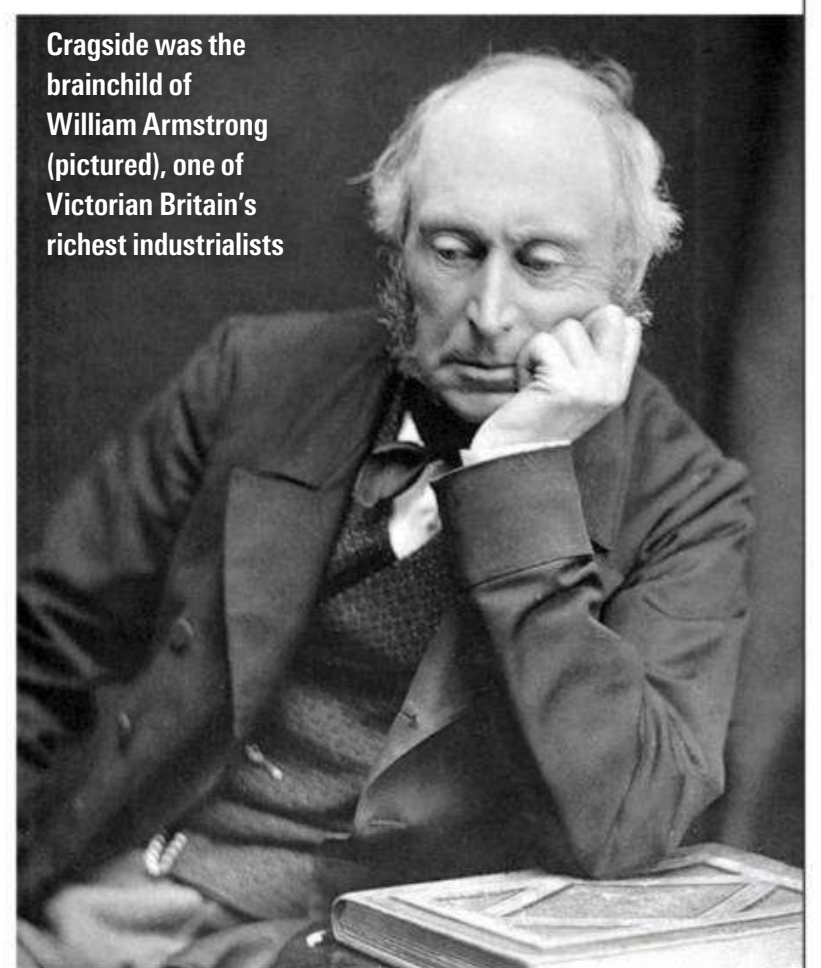
Grand designs

The impressive exterior of Cragside. The house was stuffed with the newest technologies of the time, attracting the attention of the elites of the era



LEFT: This opulent Italian marble chimneypiece was installed in the upstairs drawing room ahead of the Prince and Princess of Wales' visit to Cragside in 1884

ABOVE: Cragside's Italian Terrace, with the Loggia and the Orchard House in view



Cragside was the brainchild of William Armstrong (pictured), one of Victorian Britain's richest industrialists

Cathedrals & Churches

AT CHRISTMAS

Get inspiration for future days out from these historic venues, and check out their websites to learn about the rich stories behind them all

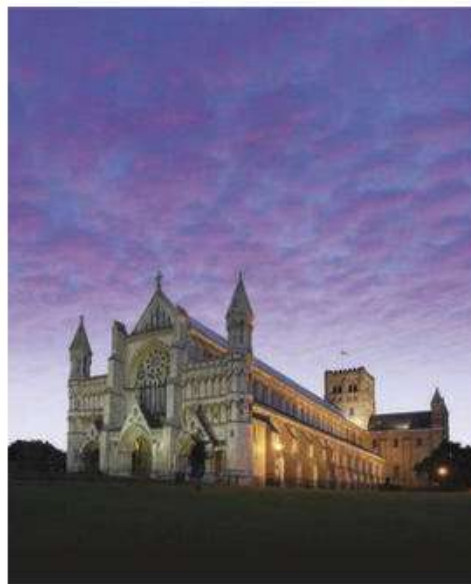
HEREFORD CATHEDRAL



This year we will be sharing many of our services, including the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols online. We will also continue to release recordings of Hereford Cathedral Choir through our website to listen to at home. Please visit our website for more details.

01432 374 200
herefordcathedral.org

ST ALBANS CATHEDRAL



Explore over 1700 years of British history with a visit to St Albans Cathedral. From walking the longest nave in Britain with its extensive collection of medieval wall paintings, to hearing the story and visiting the shrine of Alban, Britain's first saint, there's plenty to see and do, whatever day you visit.

stalbanscathedral.org
mail@stalbanscathedral.org

BUCKFAST ABBEY



Buckfast Abbey is an impressive Benedictine monastery nestled in the foothills of Dartmoor National Park. A rich musical tradition awaits visitors, from the Gregorian chant sung by the monks to choral services and concerts sung by the Abbey Choir.

01364 645 500
buckfast.org.uk

CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL



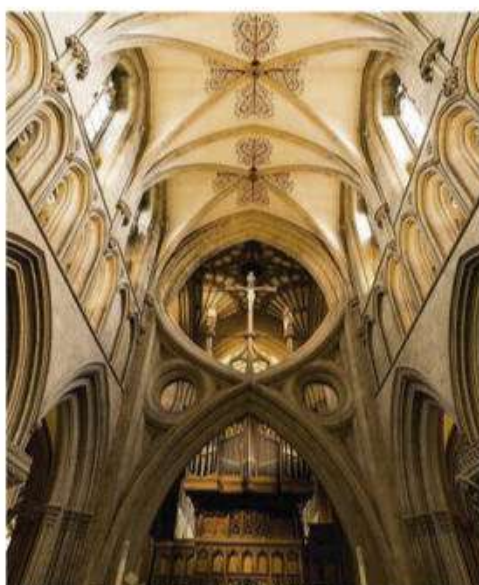
Rediscover England's first cathedral this Christmas. UNESCO World Heritage Site, seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and resting place of saints and royalty, Canterbury Cathedral's thrilling history spans over 1,400 years, telling the stories that have shaped England. From stunning stained glass and architecture to large open spaces, there's plenty to safely explore.

This December also marks the 850th anniversary of the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket in the Cathedral, which we commemorate in a special service on the 29 December.

With Kids Go Free and reduced entry charges for adults until March 2021, there's never been a better time to visit.

canterbury-cathedral.org
enquiries@canterbury-cathedral.org

WELLS CATHEDRAL

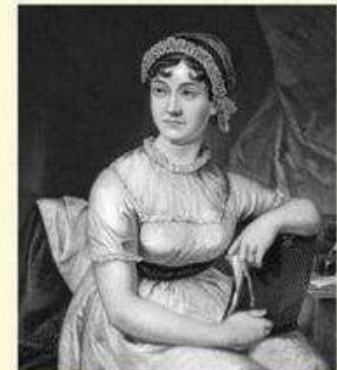


This year's Christmas celebrations from Wells will include a wonderful array of events both in the cathedral and online. Join us throughout December for Virtual Carols by Candlelight, Christmas with Tasmin Little, Carol services and much more. Explore the full festive calendar on our website.

01749 674 483
wellscathedral.org.uk

Letters From History

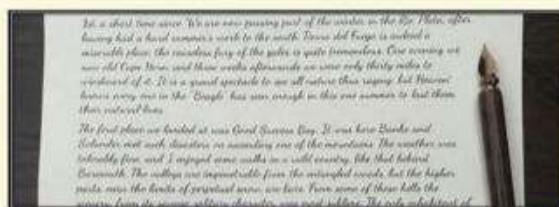
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- Choose weekly or monthly
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*some packages contain more/fewer letters – see website for details

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voyage of discovery and promise to
write regularly to avail you of all
that is new...*

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CHRISTMAS QUIZ 2020

Look out
for another
festive quiz
**ON OUR
PODCAST**

'Tis the season to test your knowledge of all things historical with our fiendish festive quiz

COMPILED BY **JUSTIN POLLARD**

Twelve days of Christmas

1. What first appears in European art on Corinthian pottery in the c8th century BC?
2. What did Richard Partridge fail to spot in Garibaldi's ankle?
3. When Babatunde Olatunji was asked to perform at Malcom X's civil rights rallies what did he play?
4. Which Tchaikovsky ballet was derided at its opening as being "too noisy, too 'Wagnerian' and too symphonic"?
5. Philip Fabricius was granted the title *Baron von Hohenfall* (Baron of Highfall) after which famous Czech event?
6. What animal did Pablo Picasso draw as a symbol for the World Peace Council in Paris in April 1949?
7. Why did Edward Jenner think milkmaids had such lovely skin?
8. What species were the 'Four Calling Birds' in the original version of 'The 12 Days of Christmas'?
9. 'Tiller Girl' Betty Boothroyd went on to hold which distinguished public office?
10. Which animals, according to Livy, saved Rome from the invading Gauls?
11. What did Bill Millin do on a D-Day beach that led German snipers to believe he had gone mad?

12. Odin apparently owned the object Draupnir which dripped eight copies of itself on every ninth night. What was it?

7



In a manger

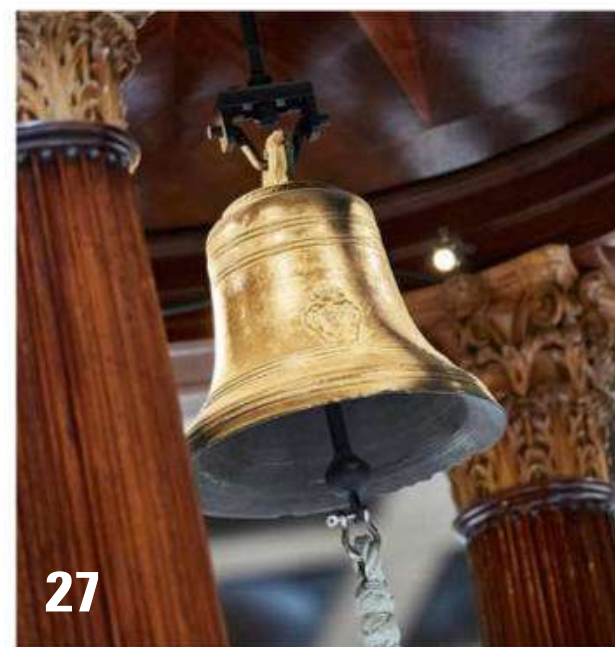
13. Blantyre in Malawi is named after the birthplace of which famous explorer?
14. The French village of Domrémy-la-Pucelle (Domrémy of the Maid) is named after which French heroine who was born there?
15. Who was born at Pella on the sixth day of Hekatombaion, the day his father's horses won at the Olympic Games?
16. Henry VIII, Mary I and Elizabeth I were all born at the long-demolished Palace of Placentia, in which Royal London borough?
17. Who went to her grave as Gabrielle Chasnel because to legally correct the misspelled name on her birth certificate would have revealed she was born in a poorhouse?

Red-nosed reindeers

18. What animal did the Soviet army use to carry ammunition to the Karelian front?
19. The Robinocracy marked the dominance of which British politician?
20. What animal did Christopher Columbus introduce to North America?
21. The Dromedarii were a late Roman auxiliary military force famed for their mode of transport. What was it?
22. The Turks believed this animal came from India, and the British thought they came from Turkey, but they actually originated in neither country. What are they?

Ding dong merrily

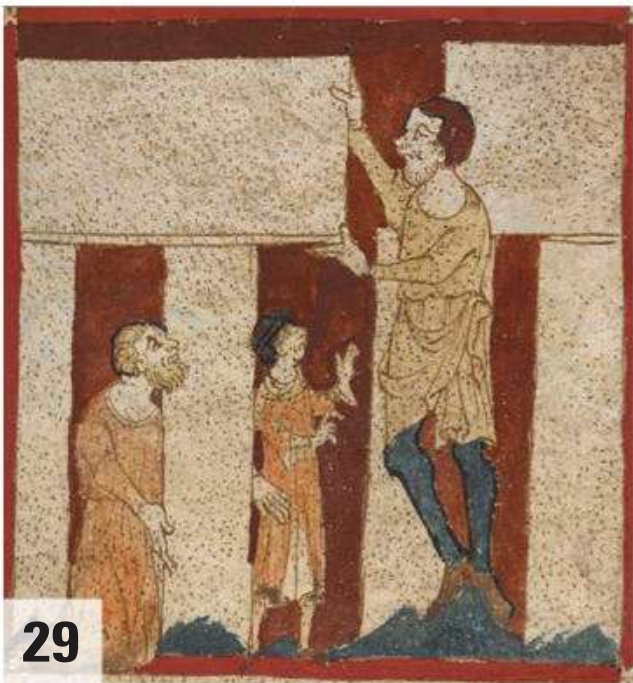
23. What Christian rite is enacted by 'Bell, Book and Candle'?
24. Whose work on hearing devices was inspired by his deaf wife and mother?
25. Which family of famous authors all used the pseudonym 'Bell'?
26. The bells of which church, also featured in the rhyme 'Oranges and Lemons', are credited with turning Dick Whittington back to London?
27. Lord Haw-Haw claimed this bell was rung continuously during the Second World War due to British shipping losses, but in fact it was only rung once, to mark the sinking of the *Bismarck*. Which bell?



DREAMSTIME/GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

Picture round

Here are five illuminated manuscripts showing famous British sites. Where are they?



2020's history headlines

33. Walls unearthed under Saint Bavo's Cathedral in Ghent in February were, unusually, made of what?
a. Human bone
b. Wood
c. Chicken droppings
34. The 1810 diary of a Yorkshire farmer has surprised historians with its liberal attitude towards what?
a. Female emancipation
b. Homosexuality
c. The French
35. Snail shells found in soil samples from the Cerne Abbas Giant show the hill figure was created when?
a. In the Bronze Age
b. In the Roman period
c. In the medieval period
36. One of Easter Island's famous Moai statues was badly damaged this year when...
a. A truck ran into it
b. A tourist pushed it over
c. A storm blew it over

2021 anniversaries

37. What event, 50 years ago this year, had everyone in Britain fumbling for change?
38. Which movie star's fame was confirmed 100 years ago with the release of the silent film *The Sheik*?
39. Which world leader died 200 years ago on a small British island in the Atlantic?
40. Four hundred years ago, 90 Wampanoags and 53 Europeans celebrated what festival for the first time?
41. Eleven hundred years ago, which Christmas favourite became Duke of Bohemia?



Noel

42. "O well" is the original first line of which famous Cornish carol?
43. Noel Godfrey Chavasse is commemorated on more war memorials than any other individual. What did he have two of that made him so special?
44. Who said: "The two most beautiful things in the world are Ivor [Novello]'s profile and my mind"?
45. The Nowell Codex contains the only copy of which Old English epic poem concerning a hero of the Geats?

Quiz answers

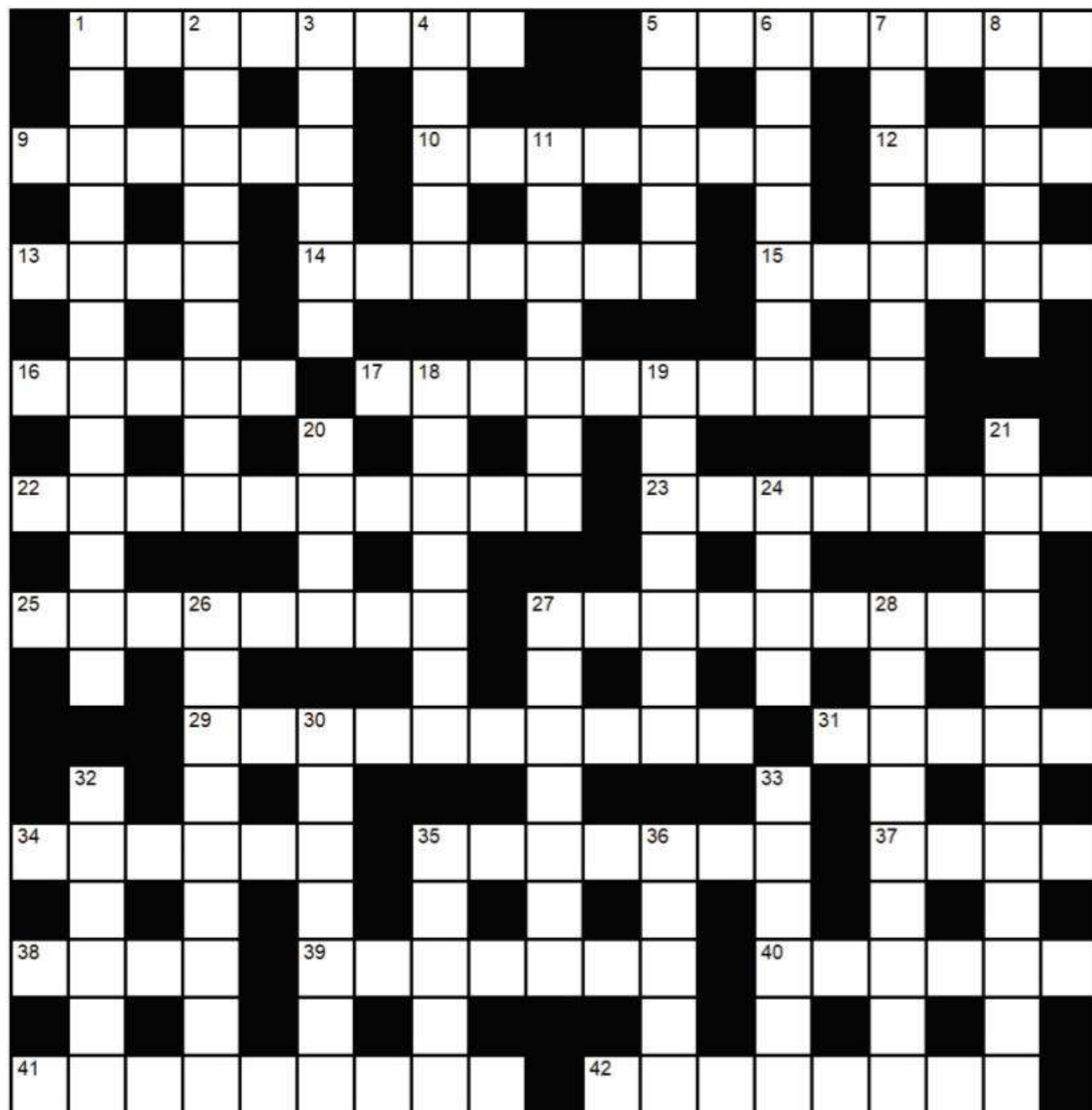
20. The ass 21. Camels 22. Turkeys
Ding dong merrily 23. Exccommunication 24. Alexander Graham Bell 25. The Brontë sisters
period 36. a. A truck ran into it
33. a. Human bone 34. b.
Homosexuality 35. c. In the medieval
2021 anniversaries 38. Rudolph
in Lloyds 26. St Mary-le-Bow 27. The Lutine Bell
Picture round 28. Canterbury Cathedral
29. Stonehenge 30. Tower of London
31. Richmond Castle 32. London
Bridge
Crosse 44. Noel Coward 45. Beowulf
Noel 42. The First Nowell 43. Victoria
40. Thanksgiving 41. Wenceslas
Valentino 39. Napoleon
2020's history headlines 37. a. Human bone 38. b. Wood
39. c. Chicken droppings
34. c. The French
35. c. In the medieval period
36. c. A storm blew it over
37. b. Wood
38. c. The French
39. c. In the medieval period
40. c. The French
41. c. The French
42. c. The French
43. c. The French
44. c. The French
45. c. The French

PRIZE CROSSWORD

Across

- 1** The most famous one (although technically a different sort of craftwork) dates from medieval times, and measures 70 metres by 50 centimetres (8)
- 5** Familiarised name of the 18th-century English-American pamphleteer, author of *Common Sense* and *Rights of Man* (3,5)
- 9** British naval ship on which a famous mutiny took place in 1789 (6)
- 10** The controversial RAF/USAF base at Greenham Common was located at the edge of this southern English town (7)
- 12** Napoleon had a notable victory over the Prussian army here in 1806 (4)
- 13/17** Esteemed 19th-century science writer; she and Caroline Herschel were the first female members of the Royal Astronomical Society (4,10)
- 14** The last great ruler of this Mesopotamian empire was Ashurbanipal (in the seventh century BC) (7)
- 15** Italian surname of David, the courtier born near Turin who became private secretary to Mary, Queen of Scots (6)
- 16** A probably legendary ancient Greek author of moral tales, often involving animals (5)
- 17** See 13 across
- 22** This small US city gained international notoriety in 1957, when nine black students were denied entry to its Central High School (6,4)
- 23** Bartolomé de ____, 16th-century historian and missionary who exposed European oppression of the indigenous peoples of the Americas (3,5)
- 25** Famous library of the University of Oxford, named after the man responsible for its restoration and

A stone relief from the palace of Ashurbanipal. But which Mesopotamian empire was he the ruler of? (see 14 across)



reopening in 1602 (8)

27 English monarch during whose reign many 'heretics', including Nicholas Ridley, were burned at the stake (5,4)

29 The capture of this city by the Union Navy in 1862 was one of the greatest

disasters suffered by the Confederacy in the American Civil War (3,7)

31 First name of the wife of Roman emperor Augustus, and the mother of his successor, Tiberius (5)

34 Name of the Lincolnshire family that holds the hereditary title of King's

(or Queen's) Champion (anagram of 'key mod') (6)

35 The country which, in 2010–11, saw the popular uprising known as the 'Jasmine Revolution', forcing the resignation of its president (7)

37 Imre ____, Hungarian leader of the country's failed revolution of 1956, who was eventually executed (4)

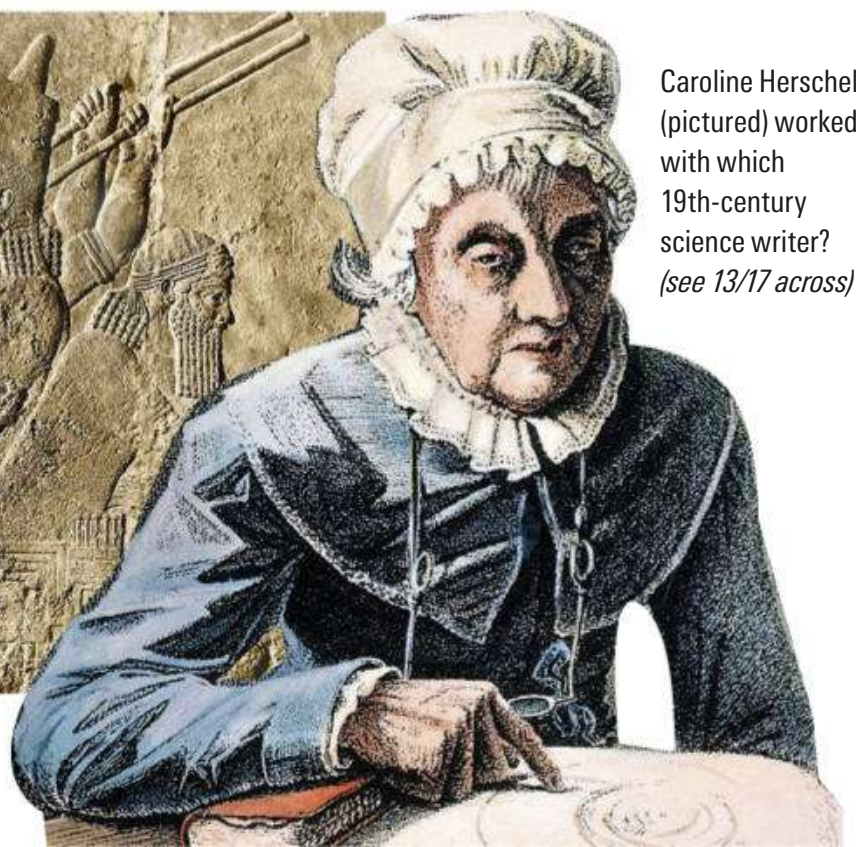
38 The Peace of Westphalia (1648) ceded this town, and two other bishoprics, Toul and Verdun, to France (4)

39 English Plantagenet monarch; also a French king who regained Calais from the English (5,2)

40 One of a number of divine prophets, particularly those associated with Apollo (6)

41 Its adoption in 1832 spelt the end of rotten boroughs in Britain (6,3)

42 James ____, the 'A6 murderer' hanged in 1962. Controversy surrounding his conviction persisted, despite DNA evidence pointing to his guilt that emerged in 2002 (8)



Caroline Herschel (pictured) worked with which 19th-century science writer? (see 13/17 across)

Orkney's Ring of Brodgar bears what kind of ancient characters? (see 4 down)

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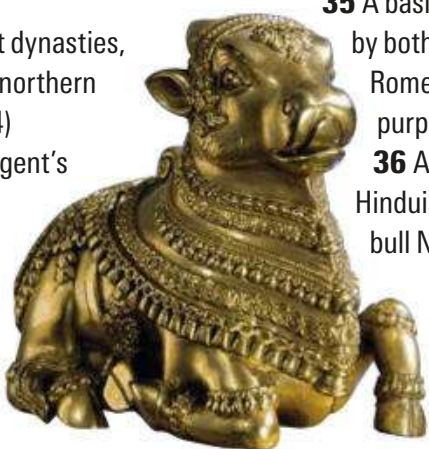
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Down

- 1** Possibly the United States' greatest inventor, whose products had an important impact on society in the 19th and 20th centuries (6,6)
- 2** The basis of modern mail services, created by a London merchant in 1680, taken over by the crown, and significantly reformed by Rowland Hill in 1840 (5,4)
- 3** Launched in May 1973, this was the first US space station (6)
- 4** The Ring of Brodgar, on Orkney, bears these ancient alphabetic characters (5)
- 5** Illyrian queen whose policy of expansion during the late third century BC precipitated a war with Rome (5)
- 6** ____ chains or collars, a traditional insignia of a high civic office (7)
- 7** Middle Eastern cable news network service founded in 1996, with funding from the emir of Qatar (2-7)
- 8** Term for a papal ambassador, derived from the Latin for 'messenger' (6)
- 11** Flanders-born pretender to the

- English throne, whose attempt to overthrow Henry VII ended with his capture in Hampshire (7)
- 18** Feargus ____, charismatic Irish Chartist leader who was declared insane in 1852 (7)
- 19** The sort of feudal tenant that the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 set out to abolish (7)
- 20** Bavarian immigrant to the US, ____ Strauss, founder of the first company to manufacture blue jeans (4)
- 21** Celebrated 19th-century English traveller, who defied convention, as a female, to explore west and equatorial Africa (4,8)
- 24** One of China's great dynasties, commonly divided into northern and southern periods (4)
- 26** It was opened in Regent's Park in 1828 (but not to the public until 1847) (6,3)
- 27** Francois ____, 18th-century French

- leader of the *physiocrats*, the first systematic school of political economy (7)
- 28** 1905 legislation, apparently designed to restrict Jewish immigration to Britain from eastern Europe (6,3)
- 30** Welsh town at the forefront of the industrial revolution, thanks to John 'Iron Mad' Wilkinson locating his works in nearby Bersham (7)
- 32** The ruins of this ancient Greek colony and important city are in present-day Libya (6)
- 33** British political party established in 1900 that first briefly came to power in 1924 (6)
- 35** A basic garment worn by both sexes in ancient Rome. That of a senator was purple-striped (5)
- 36** A great deity of Hinduism, whose mount is the bull Nandi (pictured left) (5)



Compiled by
Eddie James

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Across: 7 Barbados 8 Graham 11 Munda 12 Hollywood 13 Neolithic 15 Stoic 16 Cartimandua 20 Riots 22 Stevenson 24 Wapentake 26 Laval 27 Kroger 28 Stenness
Down: 1 Abu Mena 2 Franco 3 Cavalier 4 Goth 5 Troyes 6 Theodora 9 Medici 10 Blockade 14 Hailsham 16 Crompton 17 Duelling 18 Arawaks 19 English 21 Sanger 23 Soviet 25 Etty

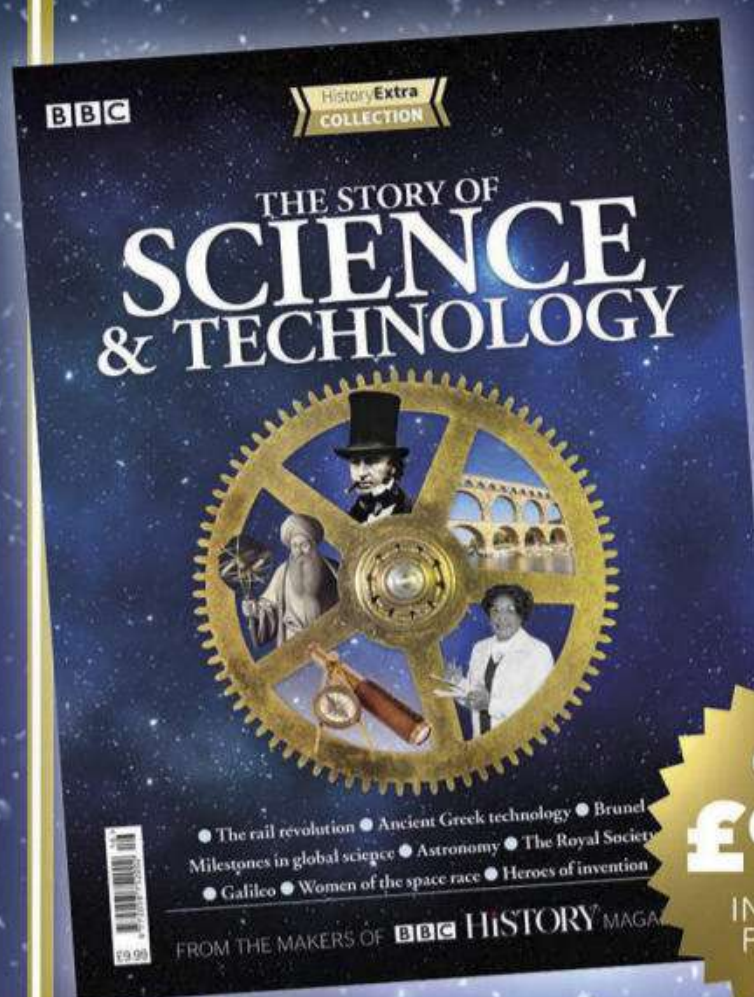
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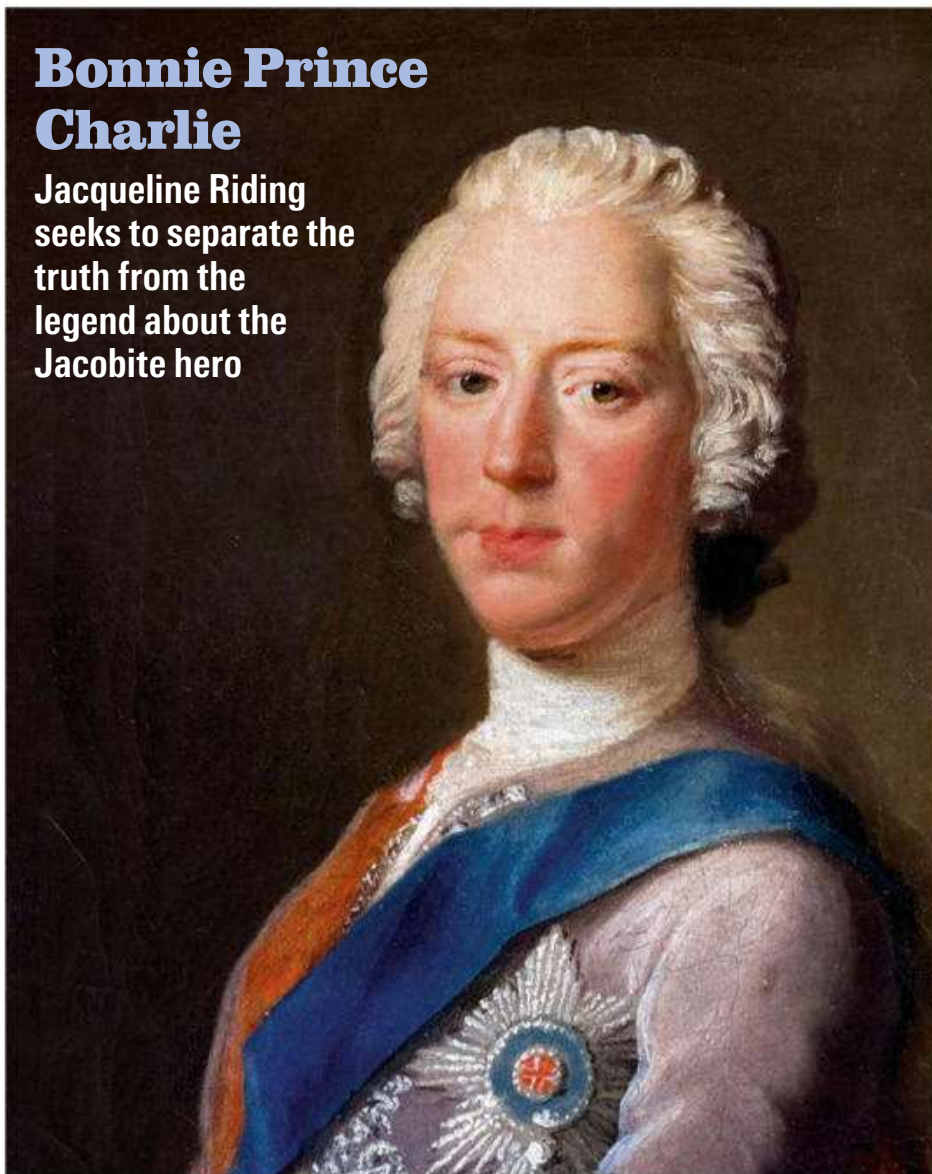
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NEXT MONTH

January issue on sale 29 December 2020

Bonnie Prince Charlie

Jacqueline Riding seeks to separate the truth from the legend about the Jacobite hero



A martyr for the ages

Emily Guerry reveals how Thomas Becket has been reimagined in the centuries since his murder

Island at war

James Holland explores the dramatic 1943 Allied invasion of Sicily, and the lessons learned for D-Day



Vaccines

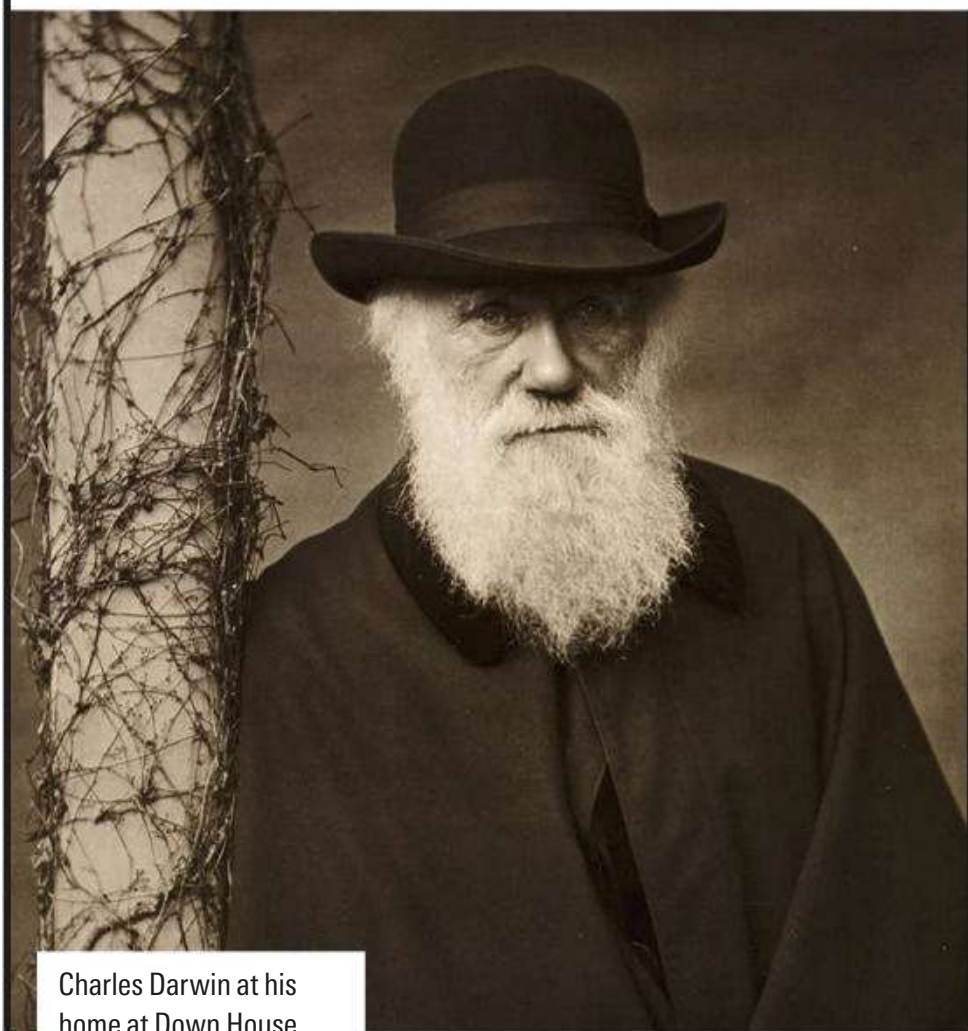
As the world battles Covid-19, Gareth Williams explains how diseases such as smallpox were eventually defeated

MY HISTORY HERO

Andrew Marr, broadcaster and author, chooses

Charles Darwin

1809–1882



Charles Darwin at his home at Down House, Kent, c1880. The naturalist and geologist made history just over two decades earlier with *On the Origin of Species*

IN PROFILE

Charles Darwin was a British naturalist and geologist. His five-year round-the-world voyage on HMS *Beagle* and subsequent publication of his diary-journal, *Journal and Remarks, 1832–1836*, established him as a leading geologist and author. But he is best-known for his groundbreaking book, *On the Origin of Species* (1859), in which he advanced his scientific theory that different species evolved over the course of time through a process of natural selection. The father-of-10 was buried in Westminster Abbey.

// Charles Darwin was endlessly curious and advanced a new way of thinking, which transformed the way the whole world thought //



When did you first hear about Charles Darwin?

I read *The Voyage of the Beagle* as a boy, but I was really only turned on to science, and biology in particular, later in life. It wasn't something I was much interested in at school, to the despair of my teachers. I then went on to champion Darwin in the BBC's *Greatest Britons* television series in 2002. I'm proud of the fact that he came fourth in the competition [behind Winston Churchill, Isambard Kingdom Brunel and Diana, Princess of Wales] though I naturally think he should have won!

Andrew Marr is best-known for presenting *The Andrew Marr Show* on BBC One. His latest book, *Elizabethans: How Modern Britain Was Forged* (William Collins), is out now, and his BBC Two series, *New Elizabethans*, is due to air this month. See p86 for more details



What kind of man was he?

He was extremely kind and empathetic, lacking pomposity in his demeanour and private life, and a loving father and husband. Yet in his intellect he was utterly ferocious and incredibly brave. To think the way that he thought, and push it to its logical conclusion, in a heavily Christianised period of our history was an extraordinary thing to do. Absolutely extraordinary.

What made Darwin a hero?

To me a hero can't be a cruel or unpleasant person by definition. By the same token, a hero has to be an open, tolerant individual who treats people from all backgrounds, as well as animals, with kindness – and Darwin was all those things. He was endlessly curious and advanced a new way of thinking which transformed the way the whole world thought. Name me another person in British history on the same scale? There's nobody.

Is there anything you don't hugely admire about him?

I don't think there was a darker side to Darwin, other than the fact that he engaged in feuds with rivals – especially with those who didn't agree with him.

Could you have ended up as a naturalist, too, if you had been born a century earlier?

We are all the prisoners, in later life, of our early education. I wish I had been more focused on the sciences in general, and biology in particular, in my schooldays, and then indeed I would love to have been a naturalist back in the heroic days...

What would you ask Darwin if you could meet him?

I'd ask him whether he thought that his view of the world meant that humans should and could be bred to make them better – in other words, did he believe in eugenics? I'm pretty sure Darwin's answer would have been: "Certainly not, what a horrible idea!" If he'd said that, he would have saved the world quite a lot of misery. 

LISTEN

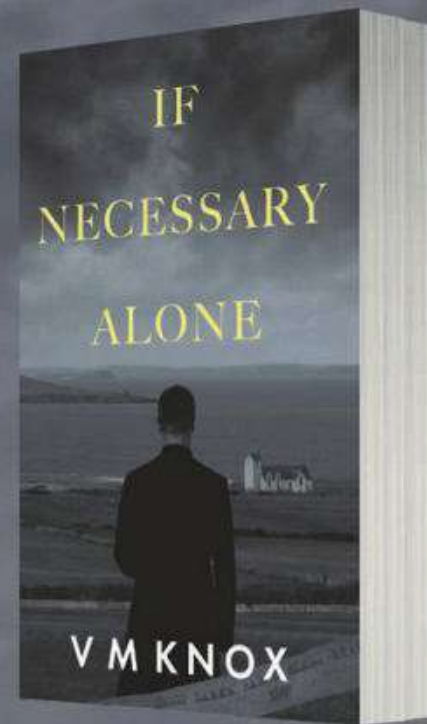
In Radio 4's *Great Lives*, guests choose inspirational figures: bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxs6

Andrew Marr was talking to York Membership

Intrigue, Murder, Revenge and Embedded Nazi Spies



In Spite of All Terror is the first in a series of crime thrillers by V M Knox that mix historical fact, crime fiction and superb characterisation. Set in September 1940, when Britain stood alone against an imminent Nazi invasion, Reverend Clement Wisdom and other men from the restricted occupations, were called to join the covert Auxiliary Units. Following the murders of several of Clement's team, he finds himself embroiled in the murky world of espionage where things are never what they seem.



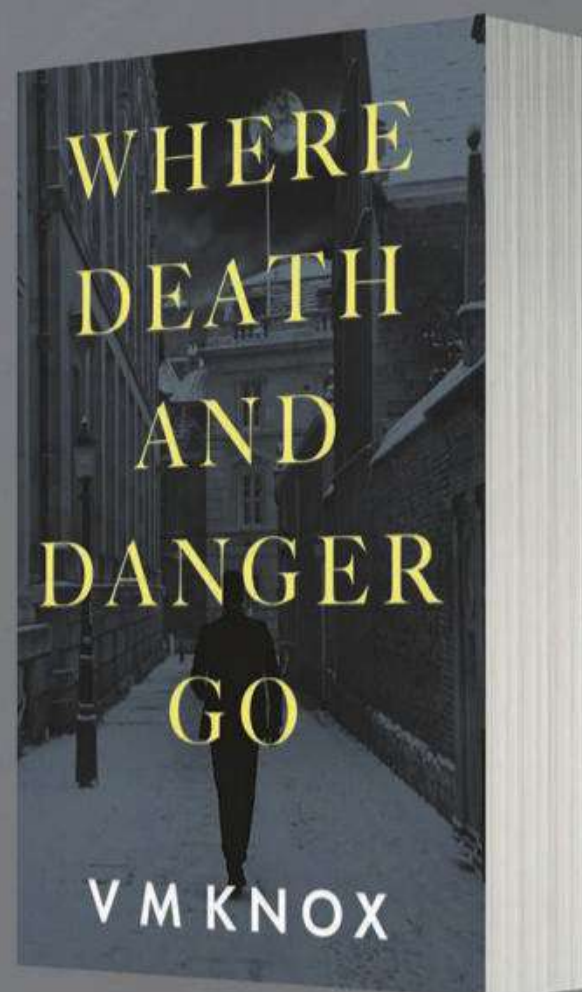
If Necessary Alone is the second thriller in this World War II crime series. Clement Wisdom, now a Major in Special Duties Branch, Secret Intelligence Service, is sent to remote Caithness to investigate illicit encrypted radio transmissions. As soon as he arrives there, an out-station wireless operator is found brutally murdered and Clement becomes entangled in a web of death and silence. Alone, and in the bitter Scottish winter, Clement must stay one step ahead of a killer if he is to remain alive.

Where Death and Danger Go is the third book in this World War II crime series. Set in the dark days of 1941, Britain fights on alone. Fear hangs in the air. Some yearn for peace and an end to the relentless Nazi bombing. Others are spurred on to fight. And some will manipulate a divided country for their own ends.

On a winter's night, a German spy parachutes into Cambridgeshire while another man is secretly murdered in the same field. Is he another enemy spy or has he been sent to his death? Either way, a killer lurks.

Major Clement Wisdom of Special Duties Branch of the SIS is sent to discover the dead man's identity and uncovers a sinister network of conspiracy where kidnap, murder and revenge threaten not only the safety of the nation but also Clement's life.

Released 5th November 2020



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